# EMILY DICKINSON

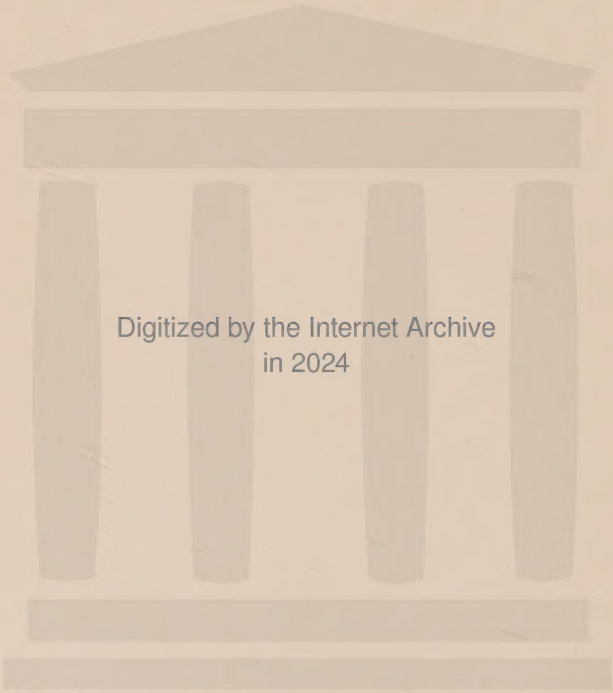
## *FRIEND AND NEIGHBOR*

BY MACGREGOR JENKINS

Sooner or later there gathers about the great a mass of legend. MacGregor Jenkins, who as a child knew the Dickinson family intimately, believes that the image of a poet like Emily Dickinson should not be blurred by unreality, but that she should be placed before the world as she truly was. Out of his rich and full memory he has written of "Miss Emily" and of her daily life as he saw it.

MACGREGOR JENKINS was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1869, and is a graduate of Williams College ('90). He is the author of "The Reading Public", "Literature with a Large L", "Bucolic Beatitudes", and "Puttering Round." For many years he was associated with editor Ellery Sedgwick as publisher of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Emily Dickinson, born in 1830, was in her forties when Mr. Jenkins was a child. His family lived near the Dickinsons in Amherst, however, and he knew "Miss Emily" not as the recluse New England genius, but as a companion in many childish enterprises. At that time few of her poems had been published, and only now, almost fifty years after her death in 1886, is her exquisite genius receiving full recognition. Conrad Aiken calls her poetry "the finest by a woman in the English language."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*To*

DID AND MATTIE

*Comrades through the years*

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*Friend and Neighbor*

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### *Friend and Neighbor*

Amherst in 1876. The Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia with its hint of the telephone and other wonders. Men and women wore strange clothes and drove in carriages, the railroad was a novelty in many parts of the country, a stagecoach was still a common sight and the bicycle was a clumsy affair dangerous to life and limb.

But this period, now almost historic in its remoteness, was a time of ferment. These same men and women, who wore strange clothes and rode in carriages, were writing, painting and carving. The American industrial giant had risen to his knees and was looking about him. The Civil War, with its unhappy aftermath, was becoming a memory. It was the beginning of a new era. The air was electric with change, minds were questioning and hearts were hoping and fearing.

But Amherst lay remote in the Pelham Hills. It felt the stirrings of the new day faintly, if at all. It was Amherst with its college, its dusty village streets, its trees and simple homes. Reached by the railroad from Palmer, a stagecoach still ran between Amherst and Northampton, driven by the redoubtable Draper, and drawn by four horses. Every Amherst boy with a spark of manhood in him regarded the driving of that coach as the summit of his ambition.

The Connecticut River was spanned by a dusty, covered bridge through the dark and mysterious interior of which the stage rattled, and less pretentious vehicles crawled, on their way to the new seat of feminine learning and enlightenment in a larger and more prosperous town. A journey to Northampton was a great event in my boyhood. Not the least of the lure was the fact that the modest bridge toll was collected by a one-armed war veteran, who combined with his duties as toll collector

the manufacture and sale of an ambrosial root beer.

When he came to the side of the carriage, on his left arm there would be glasses of this delectable beverage, poised precariously, I always thought. But the arm was wood and ingeniously flattened on the top to permit of its use as a serving tray. The glasses were tall and cool-looking. Each had a collar of white foam and my mouth would water when I saw it. There was an agonizing moment during which I wondered if the Olympian on the front seat would barter for them and permit our refreshment. For some reason I fancied the Olympian immune to the heat and dust of the Hadley meadows. I now realize that the offering was as tempting to the front seat as it was to the back. We rarely went on our way without a delicious, sticky, aromatic flavor lingering on our lips.

Amherst clustered around the college where serious men, with sober faces, talked in solemn voices to younger men. The college gave a pecu-

liar tone and flavor to the life of the village. The long, cold winter, with perpetual snow, was a season of labor and rigorous living, tempered by hospitality and genuine, if restrained enjoyment. There was much social life of a simple and delightful sort, but all touched with a certain academic restraint and detachment from life, of any sort, elsewhere.

As I write, there lie before me three tiny missives. They are invitations to attend some social gatherings. It was before the casual and informal day of the telephone with its ready aid in summoning friends. One is a small sheet with an embossed border, upon which is written in a delicate script:

*Mr. and Mrs. Hitchcock*
*request your company this*
*evening at 8 o'clock.*

*Friday Morn.*

It was delivered by hand and was evidently an informal occasion, as notice was short, but the sta-

tionery, the handwriting and the formal phrases give it a sense of decorum and importance lacking from the hasty electric summons of to-day.

Again, the same hospitable folk are entertaining, but somewhat more formally, as several days' notice is given. This time it is "Dr. and Mrs." — evidently an occasion of greater import. It reads:

*Dr. and Mrs. Hitchcock*
*request your company on*
*Friday eve. June 23rd. at*
*8 o'clock.*

*Wednesday June 21st.*

Still more formal is the third. This time the name of the intended guest is inserted quite in the more modern manner.

*Mr. and Mrs. L. C. Seelye will be*
*glad to see at their house*
*Mr. and Mrs. Adams Allen*
*next Tuesday evening, Nov. 17th*
*at eight o'clock.*

*Amherst, Nov. 14th.*

These gatherings were what were known as "evening parties" and for the most part the entertainment consisted of conversation and occasional music. This was before the day when conversation had become a lost art and had been replaced by mechanical music and moving pictures. There were other more brilliant affairs, and one or two hostesses were famous. Miss Mary French, an aunt of Eugene Field, was one of them, and she has left her prescription for a successful party of that day. It was, "flowers and lights everywhere, and to make one's way among the company and speak to every one present." Even in her prescription there is a touch of an earlier day and an earlier manner.

There were, too, "candle-light suppers" at which cold meats and salads were served, but the great delicacy was oysters, escalloped or pickled. These came in kegs from Northampton, and only the more affluent affected them. At these parties

square dances were indulged in and the children went with their parents.

Another famous hostess was Mrs. Allen, the wife of the rector of the Episcopal Church. She was Harriet Beecher Stowe's daughter, and had brought with her all the distinction of her mother's name. She attempted to substitute game suppers for the time-honored oyster, but failed, as many did, to influence Amherst's conservatism. As a brilliant woman of the period said, "We wish to remain elegantly plain." It was for these parties that my mother and the other ladies of the town "got down the black silk dress."

Every one in the town had flowers and planted trees. This was due, in part, to the influence of the Agricultural College, from the greenhouses of which many flowers were supplied for the parties, without charge. For the grander and more elegant affairs immense quantities of beautiful flowers could be secured for a trifling sum. At the college

also were gatherings to watch the unfolding of the night-blooming cereus. The annalist of these events says that "these occasions often detained the company till long after the midnight hour."

While the State College touched the people through their botanical interests, it was Amherst College that dominated the town, and gave it an atmosphere of its own. But there was more than this. The town had acquired, in some way, a quality other than that of a college town. When Emily Dickinson first began to be known and talked about, visitors came and they felt it. An itinerant journalist has left an impression of Amherst that hints at a quality which I felt as a boy and feel now when I revisit it. He attempts, even at that early day, to find in Amherst some explanation of the forces behind the poems and the woman who wrote them. It was a hopeless task, because these poems sprang from great elemental forces

that had nothing to do with the physical environment of the author.

His observations are, however, important and interesting in an attempt to study the human side of this remarkable woman and her relation to those about her. He says:

"It is hard to describe the charm of Amherst to anyone who has not felt it, the charm of mountain and valley, of wilderness and thoroughfare, of college and county-seat. The most untamed of wildflowers blossom within a short walk of the new townhall, and under the very eaves of the college library may be picked up provincialisms to last a dialect writer a life-time.

"Every thing has happened here from the rebellion of Daniel Shays to the writing of these remarkable poems. Callous mortal as I am, associations twitched my sleeve and jogged my elbow as I sauntered along the streets, asking me what company of merry children racketed in that big, square

house until it looks as if it were full to bursting with happy secrets? What love-lorn maiden looked out of that gray dormer window for a lover who came not, and whispered her disappointment to the old rosebush which still stands at the window waiting for a conclusion of the story. Between those sentinel lilacs how many generations of stalwart men have been carried out 'whither they knew not'? Those of us who come and go in the valley do not know, but Holyoke and Mount Tom, Sugarloaf and the gentle Pelham hills do. Perhaps the poet would have said that the hills had told her all she knew of her town and her fellow townspeople, but if they had told her everything she would have been a novelist and not a poet. There is a fine independence about them that savors of the days when ample acres gave man an opportunity to flourish his elbows.

"Others beside Emily Dickinson felt this influence. 'Upon my word,' said a certain dear lady

whose home was on one of the less frequented streets, ' it looks as if everybody had left town, and I am glad of it.' She settled herself to her knitting with a sense of having her world to herself.

" Other tides have fed Amherst, other and distant streams of intellectual and social life. There are men here who study for the benefit of the world, who write books to be published and not hidden away, who perpetrate witticisms and wise sayings to have them repeated, not for the mere satisfaction of uttering them. One feels the presence of an audience in the background of many sayings attributed to a not distant kinswoman of Miss Dickinson. ' Why do people rave,' she said, ' over the beauty of daisies? They look to me like hard-boiled eggs cut in two.' She probably was not surprised when the conceit traveled far and wide.

" Emily Dickinson was the child of Amherst, of its whimsicality and culture and its freedom, the child of Amherst when she mused in her garden

and asked the Pelham Hills 'What is morning?' and when she admitted the children to her confidence and when she was borne over the green fields to the cemetery by men who had been faithful servants in her father's household."

This "fine independence" to which the journalist refers was a very striking characteristic of the town and college. Much that to-day might be called provincialism was really a sturdy independence of thought and action, and an unyielding loyalty to the traditions of the college and the town. One of the more eminent of the college professors did a daring and unusual thing. He traveled abroad during one of the summer vacations. He met without diffidence or self-assertion the most distinguished of Europe's scholars and was the peer of any of them in intellectual attainments.

Part of his equipment for foreign travel was a large cotton umbrella which he always carried with him. It had no case and to make it more conven-

ient it was tied firmly about with a pink cotton string.

A daring French intellectual was interested and amused by it and asked the professor why he carried such an umbrella tied in just this manner. His reply was:

" Our President carries such an umbrella tied in just this manner. What is good enough for him is good enough for me."

Scenting an opportunity for investigation into the democratic standards of America the surprised Frenchman said:

" What, the President of the United States carries an umbrella like that? "

The professor replied, with just a touch of reproval in his voice:

" When I say ' our President,' I mean, of course, the President of Amherst College." To him there was but one college, and one President, and that was Amherst College and its venerated head.

After the long winter, the reluctant New England spring would come, reticent, shy and uncertain like her human kinfolk. She would scatter early flowers in the gardens, only to fly to the safety of Father Winter's arms if the sun became too ardent. But by June she became bold and lavish in her gifts. With June came Commencement. With Commencement came high hats and cockades, blaring bands, and "epaulets and swords." In those days the ritual of graduation was more splendid than it is to-day. Feasts, reunions and callow boys declaiming the obvious in terms of the infinite. That was the apotheosis of Amherst. Then the summer with its hush, its wistful lethargy that those of us who know and love New England always feel. This, then, was Amherst.

But it was not all of Amherst, for near the village church stood a group of houses where life throbbed the twelve months through. Staid New England houses were they. Separated, as was the

wont, by hedge and fence, yet bound together by a strange community of life and heart. In one there lived the village pastor with his wife and two children. Across the narrow street dwelt the professor of Greek, his wife and three children, and beyond the main street of the village were two sober houses behind still loftier hedges. Great houses were they in their day. They stood a little apart but close enough to show that they were kin. Smooth lawns with mighty trees surrounded them. A picket fence and hedge kept them a bit aloof. You mounted granite steps in terraces to gain their doors.

In one lived Edward Dickinson. A mighty man he always seemed to me. Tall, he walked erect and carried a cane and wore a stock. He was a man learned in the law and held public office at home and at the Nation's Capitol. He lived a sober life in his staid house with his wife and two unmarried daughters.

For his son he had built close at hand another house, and it was this house that, as a child, I knew and loved. Its presence there and its history is one of those queer happenings that govern lives and shape destinies. His son, William Austin Dickinson, but commonly known as Austin Dickinson, was, like his father, a lawyer. As a young man he had an opportunity to associate himself with a growing law firm in a distant city. It was a great chance for a young man and he was tempted to leave Amherst and seek his fortune in a larger community. His father had a stern New England pride in the traditions of his town and county. He wanted his son to take his place in public affairs and in the growing importance of the college. He told Austin that he would build him a house on his estate, to which he could bring his bride, if he would abandon the plan to leave Amherst and remain to carry on the traditions of the family. He did so, and the house I knew was built.

This decision had a far-reaching influence on the lives of many people, and in my own it was a turning point. It was Austin Dickinson's influence more than any other one thing that brought my father to his pastorate at the village church, and it was his figure and those of the members of his family which dominated the first impressionable years of my life. Austin Dickinson himself, his wife — a dark-eyed, brilliant woman, whose voice enthralled me — and their two children are the outstanding intimate figures in my memories of Amherst. These two, the pastor's two, of which I was one, and the three from the professor's household made a noisy, piratical band which roamed at large over the ample length and breadth of the three places. I occupied the unfortunate position of the youngest, but I was accorded full membership and manfully I tried to equal their exploits and not to hinder in any enterprise, no matter how hazardous. Ned, Mattie, Did (my sister) Will,

another Ned (known as "Little Ned", to distinguish him from the elder one) and Ally; — how the names come back.

We roamed and quarreled, sailed the high seas, hunted buffalo and split into hostile groups, only to swear a new and more vehement allegiance. We lived drunk with the romance of childhood. Of all our playgrounds, the most fascinating and alluring was the Edward Dickinson house and its environs. Why, I do not know. Its garden and orchard, its barn and outbuildings seemed to us to present more romantic possibilities than any other. Here we seemed to breathe an atmosphere that stirred us deeply. Here there seemed to be a quicker pulse, a headier wine than even fifty yards away. There were no children in the house, there was no gayety, no noise, and yet we sought it always, drawn irresistibly to it by something, — what we did not know. We felt it, but we could not understand.

I know now what it was. I know that the hearts of those children turned instinctively to a heart in that house as young and as pure as theirs. A heart not a day older except in the wisdom of spiritual experience and a sensitiveness to life and its beauty that set it apart from all the rest of the world and yet bound it to the world with shackles of gold. In that house dwelt a Rare Presence. In that house Emily Dickinson was leading her exquisite, vibrant life, not as a morbid recluse, as some would have it, but as an enthralled observer of all the great things that make the soul a soul, and not a tiny spark conscious only of the obvious things.

And the children felt this. They knew Miss Emily well. She was not shy with them. She was a splendid comrade and a stanch champion. Her ready smile, her dancing eyes, her quick reply made us all tingle with pleasure when we were near her, but there was something more than kindness, and largesse of gingerbread, and pleasant

words and kindly smiles. She made us feel near a thousand things we did not understand; she seemed to bring to us a world of fancy, a world of beauty, a world of hidden lovely things. Things that we never talked about, because we did not know how to talk about them; vague intimations of forces that we felt about us, but no one could explain to us; a feeling that there were a million things in life that were sweet and beautiful that our hungry lips could not taste or our eager hands touch. That was what brought us daily to her door; that is why we found her austere surroundings more full of romance than any other playground; and that is why, in the reticent manner of children whose emotions are touched for the first time, we loved her with a timorous and unconscious devotion.

The family provided a curious setting for Miss

Emily. The father, a quiet, austere man, whose thoughts were hidden beneath a courtly manner, the mother, a frail and somewhat wistful woman, failing even then in bodily vigor, and the sister Lavinia. Of Edward Dickinson my recollections are meager; a cane and stock seem to be about all there is in the picture. It always struck me as one of the inexplicable things in life that he was Miss Emily's father. I have learned since of his pride in her during her brief social career in Amherst and Washington, and his tenderness to her during the last years of his life. Mrs. Dickinson was never anything to me but a silent little figure in the background of Miss Emily's life, but of the sister Lavinia I have the liveliest recollections.

She was a person to be reckoned with. Small, with gray eyes and black hair, shrill of voice and dominating in manner, she was a militant person if there ever was one. As a child I always thought of her as a curious combination of a witch and a

dragon. But I felt, too, that her attitude of defiance toward the world, her willingness to throw down the gage of battle to college president or butcher boy, who had the temerity to approach her threshold, was part of an intense loyalty to and affection for her gifted sister. Lavinia stood ready, at a moment's notice, to fight to the death the world and life itself, lest it impinge too heavily upon her beloved Emily. This gave to her whole life an appearance of a fierce watchfulness, an eternal vigilance which suggested the idea of a defending dragon to the children.

This intense loyalty to family and to friends was a Dickinson trait, and in none of them was it more marked than in Lavinia. A friend who knew her well and was in her confidence said at the time of her death, " This enthusiastic devotion to one member of the family circle extended in turn to every other. Her fiercest denunciations were reserved for those who ventured to oppose, or even call in

question, the opinions of her father or brother on matters of public concern. Unwavering and admiring loyalty to her family was the first article of her creed."

It was her fate to be the last member of her immediate family to survive, and the last years of her life were spent in loneliness only relieved by the unalloyed pleasure she derived from the public recognition of her sister's genius. This and the loving attention of her brother's family, particularly the sharing with the eldest son, Ned, his literary and artistic interests were her supporting comforts. In the glamor of her sister's acclaim it is easy to lose sight of Lavinia, but she had much to make her unusual. She knew her Dickens from beginning to end, and she and her nephew developed a dialect made up of names, allusions and quotations from Dickens which they used, and which was quite impossible for other members of the family to understand.

She had the fearless independence of thought and action which seemed to be a Dickinson heritage, and she was quite as unconventional in some ways as was her more distinguished sister. She was born on the twenty-ninth of February, and always regarded the fact that her birthday was on an odd fag-end of a day, tucked into the calendar for no very good reason, with a grim and somewhat pensive humor. In one of her more intimate letters she acknowledged a birthday gift, and added, "I believe you would send me the head of John the Baptist if I asked for it and you could find it. This is not a cheerful day to be born but circumstances alter cases. I have noticed that the Father of our Country always has a good day for his birth, and I suppose because he never told a lie — I never considered it a distinguished accomplishment." During the last years of her life she lived alone with her six cats which she described as "engaged in holding High Mass for two weeks with the result that I am

down with nervous prostration, but they are very dear and comforting."

She was absolutely devoted to her brother, Austin, and after his death referred to him as a "gallant soul who gave me perfect comfort and companionship." A high tribute. In a brief notice of her, at the time of her death, an intimate friend characterized her as "a brave, vehement and loyal soul." Despite the blurred memories of childhood I know her to have been that.

And last but not least Maggie, the "hired girl" of those simple and far-off days. If she ever had any other name than "Maggie" it was irrevocably lost, as far as the children were concerned. She was "Maggie" to us, and nothing more, from the beginning to the end of our tempestuous friendship. No woman in the world but Maggie could have been found in such a household. From the beginning of time it had been ordained that she should appear and take her place in the economy

of things. Generations of forebears and cycles of time, events and influences had formed her for one purpose, to take her place as guardian and dictator in the home of genius.

She seemed to have been endowed with some of the Dickinson traits and characteristics. She had their dynamic vigor, physical and spiritual, their rugged independence of thought and action, and a curious suggestion of breathless haste to fulfill their earthly destiny, though countless heathen raged and imagined unimaginable things.

Of all their family characteristics this sense of breathlessness, of a desire to be about the business of their lives, a fearless stepping forward to meet what waited them was the overshadowing one. You felt it in all of them, children and adults. It placed a mark of distinction on them all. In some curious fashion Maggie gave the same impression. In the midst of her humble domestic duties, and they were very varied, she gave the impression of

hurrying to meet the next, that just around the corner there were momentous events awaiting and she must be ready.

She was another valiant soul, and she too "scented the battle afar off" and rejoiced in it.

With Lavinia she presented a formidable garrison to be overcome by an invader. Peace did not always reign, and the garrison was not always of one mind. Periods of dissension came, and then the echoes of a Homeric combat would reach our childish ears. But this only added to the mystery and charm of the fairy land in which we lived. To feel mighty forces of which we were only dimly conscious was an enthralling experience. Next to Miss Emily, Maggie was beloved. We feared her as we feared the thunder caps over the Pelham Hills but we loved her because we knew she loved Miss Emily and she loved us too.

And Miss Emily, what of her? It is hard to

write with due restraint and preserve the values. How much was it the witchery of her appearance and her sequestered life and how much was it the singular emanations that came from a rare and gifted personality? It is hard to say; a good deal of both I fancy. I remember her as slight of stature, quick, graceful and animated in every movement and gesture. I seem to see through the mist of years a mass of glorious auburn hair and a pair of lustrous eyes. These eyes have followed me all my life. They never were the same for a moment, but changing, shifting with her mood. One moment dancing with fun, gleaming with a gentle but defiant wickedness, and melting to a softness and loveliness that filled our hearts with a very new and very wonderful feeling. I recall her as usually dressed in white which added to the effect of fragility and unreality that always baffled me. Baffled me because Miss Emily was not really fragile; she was far too dynamic a person to create

any such impression, and she certainly was real. Her participations in our games, her stout defense of us in times of stress, her defiance of Maggie in raiding the pantry that we should be well supplied with cookies or doughnuts, all these were the attributes of a very real and a very human friend and comrade. But it was baffling, for in the midst of her boldest raid in our behalf, a footstep would be heard outside the kitchen door and our laughing goddess of plenty would become the flutter of the edge of a white skirt behind a closing door. It was baffling.

Her attitude toward this perplexing habit of precipitous flight was puzzling. It was not panic, we knew that. It was not timidity nor was it unfriendliness. We knew her to be the bravest person in the world; the fact that she was not afraid of Maggie proved that. She certainly was not unfriendly — her constant thought of us and her other friends belied any such imputation — and yet she

always impressed us as a bird poised for flight. The slightest incursion from the outside would cause her to disappear suddenly and completely. There would be no cry of alarm, no ruffling of feathers, no undignified haste, but smoothly, silently, and often with a swift parting smile she would vanish, only to return and resume her ministrations when the intruder had taken his departure.

She never expressed concern or impatience when interrupted in her play with us, nor did she try to conceal from us her unwillingness to be discovered. She never invented lame excuses to explain her disappearances nor did she ever return to us with the slightest air of self-consciousness. Puzzle as we might about it, there seemed to be no explanation. It was just part of Miss Emily and we accepted it as such. And it was a most charming and alluring part.

She once said to us, as she was busy in the pantry

with a group of hungry and expectant youngsters about her:

"You know, dears, if the butcher boy should come now, I would jump into the flour barrel."

I, for one, was unregenerate enough to wish devoutly that he might. To have seen Miss Emily seek refuge in the fragrant and snowy depths of the flour barrel would have been an exciting and soul-satisfying episode. The whiteness of her skin and dress, the dainty fragility of her slender figure made such a refuge seem to me the most appropriate place in the world. But, alas! the butcher boy failed to come at just the right moment, and I could only content myself with wistful imaginings of what, I knew, would have been a charmingly consistent episode in my relations with this mysterious being.

The suggestiveness of this to me, to-day, lies in the fact that Miss Emily spoke as she did. She seemed to regard this strange habit of hers, at least

as far as the children were concerned, as an inexplicable trait in her that she neither attempted to conceal nor to explain. She seemed to accept it, and expected us to accept it, as a part of her nature. And she accepted it with a touch of tolerant and slightly ironic humor which made it all the more charming to us bewildered youngsters.

It is impossible to imagine a personality that would appeal more strongly to children than Miss Emily's. It is difficult to describe the impression she made. It was not fear, it was not awe. We felt freer with her than with any other of the older generation in either family. We had a sense of intimacy and understanding, a feeling that we did not have to be on our good behavior, but we always had an instinctive impulse to curb our noise and to improve, if possible, our personal appearance, and above all things to watch with all our eyes. To watch so that we might not miss a word or gesture. This feeling was induced, I fancy, by

the fact that she might disappear at any moment, and we wanted to squeeze the last atom of pleasure out of her momentary presence. But this was not all. There was a feeling that she was a creature made of a little different material, cast in a finer mold and created for a purpose unknown to us. I always wondered where she went and what she did when she disappeared, and I thought of her chamber above stairs as a strange and somewhat eerie abode unlike any other human habitation. On the whole, I think my boyish impression of our relations with Miss Emily was that it was a good deal like being on terms of friendly intimacy with a lunar moth. And the wonder to me was that the terms were friendly and were intimate.

She had a habit of speaking of herself in the third person. She would say, "Emily will see that you are supplied. Emily will see that you are not blamed." This trick of speech gave a tremendous sense of authority to what she said, and we

knew that whatever she promised would be performed. She was in constant communication with the members of our families and we were the frequent bearers of notes and messages to them. Her interest in and affection for her friends and neighbors did not stop with the children.

She went often across the lawn to her brother's house. It was through him, and his handsome wife, the "Sue" of her letters and messages, that she kept in touch with the life of her circle, and to a considerable extent with the village and the world. It was here that she would fly to the piano, if the mood required, and thunder out a composition of her own which she laughingly but appropriately called "The Devil", and when her father came, lantern in hand, to see that she reached home in safety, she would elude him and dart through the darkness to reach home before him. This was pure mischief and there was much of it in her. There was a great deal of a number of

things in her, but what is likely to be overlooked by the world, in its amazement and wonder at her genius, is that she was a very normal and human person. A genius, yes, perhaps the greatest poet this country ever produced but, with it all, a human being. Willful, mischievous, warm, impulsive, proud, hating and loving like the rest of us. The exquisite sympathy with and appreciation of Nature that marks her poems gave her the same appreciation of and the same sympathy with the friends that were about her.

She had a habit of standing in rapt attention as if she were listening to something very faint and far off. We children often saw her at sunset, standing at the kitchen window, peering through a vista in the trees to the western sky, — her proud little head thrown back, her eyes raised and one hand held characteristically before her. This is the rapt, detached poetic figure that the world knows and loves, but we children knew that the

slender fingers of that upraised hand still bore telltale evidence of having been, but a moment before, in the depths of Maggie's cooky box that we might not go unfed. It was this duality of nature, this rare combination of the mystic and the playmate that made her what she was to us. And it is this same duality of nature that makes her writing appeal as it does. There have been countless men and women who have led sequestered lives and written out of their experience, whose messages have fallen on unhearing ears and are long since forgotten. This was their fate because, when they retired from the world, they lost spiritual touch with it. They fancied that it was dross and that their natures should be purged of all association with it. Not so Miss Emily. Her retirement may well have been as complete as theirs, she may have closed the door as resolutely to many of the demands and solicitudes of commonplace things, but she never lost touch with the essentials of human

life and experience. The messages she sent out were more often than not expressed in terms of the common, familiar things in life, and the most profound expression of her philosophy of life was often phrased in an analogy drawn from simple things in nature and everyday experience.

And what a perfect playmate she was. Never actually in the game but always hovering near us, adding that touch of mystery and charm that children feel and love. Were we pirates, storm-tossed, starving on some barren isle (starvation played an important part in all our games) some signal would be given, a soft tap on window glass or a fluttered handkerchief, and succor would come from an unexpected source. We had grown to half expect it, but its arrival always gave us the thrill of the unexpected and unusual. A window would be opened, silently and with the utmost caution. I never could decide whether her care and deliberation were part of the game or whether they were

to avoid attracting Maggie's vigilant attention. But the window would be in Miss Emily's room, and soon on the window ledge would appear a basket. It would be slowly lowered. I can see it now, jerking its way down from what seemed to us then an incredible height. We saw two delicate hands playing out a much knotted cord, and framed in the window above a slender figure in white and a pair of laughing eyes.

I shall never forget the contents of that basket. It was as like Miss Emily as it could possibly be, and by the same token as unlike any one else. The basket always contained gingerbread, whether of her own making or Maggie's I do not know. It was not like any gingerbread I had ever seen before or have ever encountered since. It was in the form of long, oval cakes, crisp and brown on the outside, but within a light brown or yellow and delicately sweet and gummy. The flat tops were hard and shiny and on these a bit of decoration was often

added, in the way of a pansy or other small flower.

Not abruptly and with wild whoops of delight did we approach this manna. It had come to us in the accepted and appropriate fashion and all must be done with nice attention to the proprieties. So we would approach the basket with due caution and indirection, creeping through the grass, taking every precaution lest we be surprised and overcome by unfriendly savages. At last the prize was in our hands, a crumpled daisy or clover put in the basket by way of tribute, and it would make its uncertain ascent to a cloistered window.

Something told us that to sit in a greedy circle and devour this provender beneath this window was not fitting. It was not appropriate for beings as "ethereal" as ourselves, though we certainly never laid claim to this quality. We recognized it in Miss Emily however and we knew that to make our hasty and somewhat gummy repast a spectacle for her to witness was neither fitting nor expedient.

So we scampered off to a well-remembered woodpile, behind and on top of which we spent many hours. Here we ate with eagerness and without "ethereal" restraint every crumb we had been given.

It was on this woodpile that the first, and perhaps the most poignant, of the tragedies of my boyhood occurred. Some enterprise was afoot too dangerous or too unlawful for me to participate in, and I was left behind. This was in itself an indignity which wounded more than I would admit, but the laws of the clan were inviolable; the voice of authority had spoken and it was for me to obey. After consultation the woodpile was selected as a safe and convenient place for my temporary exile. I recall that one reason for its selection was that it lay directly in the line of what might prove a hasty retreat from the scene of operations, and I could be retrieved and taken along without undue delay. I have no doubt that I presented a woebegone ap-

pearance and Mattie, always prompt and impulsive in acts of vengeance or generosity, consoled me by letting me have her most prized possession as a solace in my loneliness. It was a new and shiny set of jackstones, recently acquired and greatly treasured. During the prolonged absence of my fellow conspirators I played with them in a languid and detached manner. They did not interest me, until I found, to my horror, that I had lost several of them down the yawning cracks between the logs. Their recovery was far beyond my powers. I could neither lift the logs nor move them. For an hour I lay on their rough and splintered surfaces in an agony of grief and self-abasement. I had been false to a sacred trust. I had failed miserably to meet the first great responsibility reposed upon me. How was I ever to meet the reproachful eyes of my benefactress when I confessed my guilt? No failure in later life ever caused the bitterness that did, and it induced in me

a queer association of anguish with every woodpile I have ever seen since that awful day. I recall the interminable hours while I waited for the time of judgment. A merciful veil has been drawn over what transpired when the owner of the jackstones returned. I imagine that the consequences of my faithlessness were so much less alarming than my anticipation of them that they have faded and left me only the memory of my terror of impending doom and possible complete annihilation.

How clearly these trifling incidents come back through the mist of years. Trifling in themselves and yet eloquent of a period in the lives of all of us when most of its thrill and beauty came in some mysterious way from our casual contacts with the wonderful woman whose genius the world is now acclaiming.

It would have been a much simpler method for Miss Emily to have supplied our wants through

Maggie (who was at times amenable to the impulses of generosity) or to have come to a lower window and handed her offering to us, but there was something in her that rebelled at so casual and conventional a method. She had a perfect feeling for the fitness of things. She knew, while we craved the gift and would not have refused it, no matter what the manner of its offering, that to have it come to us in perfect consistency with the dramatic needs of the moment filled our hearts with a strange delight.

One of our favorite games was to make a gypsy camp under the trees near the Austin Dickinson barn. We particularly liked to assume characters of this nomadic character because it involved the necessity of frequent raids for food. That seemed to us the only normal function of a gypsy, and was the reason we so longed to be abducted and carried away by them as we had heard that fortunate children had been. In the absence of this blissful

consummation of our desires, we contented ourselves with impersonating them for days at a time.

Miss Emily had what might be called a "feeling" for gypsies. In fact, she had the keenest sympathy with any form of romantic, roving life. When the flaring billboards announced the early arrival in town of the modest circus of those days she would sit at her chamber window all night that she might not miss its mysterious arrival or departure. She was sure to be with us in the game of gypsies. Then her gifts became more ample and of greater variety.

I have learned since those days that it was not always easy for Miss Emily to secure all she needed for us. Maggie was watchful, Lavinia frugal, and while they both were kind and generous to us, they felt that on some occasions Miss Emily was a bit lavish. I am quite sure now that she was. I recall one day when we appeared in gypsy array be-

neath her window that there was a considerable delay in the appearance of the basket. The larder was depleted or else Maggie unusually firm, for when it did appear it contained, instead of the usual gingerbread, several cupfuls of raisins. None of us had eaten them before except in cakes or cookies, and to have them in such quantity was a new experience.

Mattie and I were the marauding scouts that day, and this novel gift led us to forget our fellows, for we ate all the raisins ourselves. The results were disastrous and we both confess now a mature lack of interest in an uncooked raisin.

Again we were knights-errant, panoplied in pasteboard shields and armed with wooden swords. We roved our tiny world in quest of adventure. We sought some high endeavor, some shining grail. This was not to be found in the confines of the village parsonage or in home of the professor of Greek. There was but one place where we

could hope to have our quest rewarded. There was but one lady, beautiful and in foul duress, who would understand the significance of our crusade. With that curious, soul-satisfying self-deception known to childhood we never admitted to ourselves, even, that the end of our quest was known and understood by all. We maintained the fiction among us that our ultimate arrival below Miss Emily's window was wholly fortuitous. The journey was made as long and as indirect as the ingenuity of our leaders could devise. A thousand adventures were encountered and prodigies of valor performed by the elder ones before the admiring eyes of the youngsters. But no matter how long the journey or how eventful its course, it always ended with our cautious approach to a familiar castle. We were always rewarded by the sight of a slender figure at an upper window. We saw it but we pretended not to, for there was much serious business to be attended to before we could ap-

proach. The castle was heavily guarded, moat and bastion intervened. Fierce, hireling minions of the keeper of the close were met in single combat and slain and quartered with bloody gusto. Dragons, breathing fire and destruction, were left writhing helpless on the ground, then blades were wiped and we saluted the lady of our endeavors. The mimic drama was commonplace enough, but what gave it a sense of reality to us was the face at the window, a face responsive to every turn in the stupendous tide of battle waged for her benefit and a feeling that it was all as real to her as it was to us.

Then a bit of paper would flutter to the ground and we would pounce upon it. Just a scrap of paper floating in the fitful New England breeze with a few words penciled upon it. With beating hearts we would unfold it and read the message. Sometimes we hardly knew what the words meant; sometimes the difficult handwriting baffled us, but we knew it was important because Miss Emily

wrote it. Each in turn would retain the treasure and, when play was over, would bear it home in triumph.

Half a dozen of these messages lie before me as I write. Bits of paper, half note sheets and some even smaller, each bearing the delicate tracery of her curious handwriting. For the most part thin, highly polished and unruled, the polite stationery of a bygone period. How have these tiny missives happened to survive all these years? Why were they stored away among the priceless treasures of a turbulent and exciting childhood? Countless things, apparently more important and certainly more closely associated with the conventional interests of childhood, have long since disappeared. But these bits of paper have remained hoarded and kept safe. It certainly does not strain the probabilities to fancy that we felt then, what the world is feeling to-day, that they were in some strange

way an expression of something very rare and very beautiful. That they were bits of life and color from a world of fancy and sentiment strangely aloof and yet strangely near the heart of a child, messages from a region upon the edge of which every child lives, and the mystery of which he vaguely feels.

Miss Emily's relations with the children were full of fanciful implications. She was deeply attached to us, I know, but there was always a whimsical, playful element in it. While she loved us, she was at play with us, and in some ways the game was quite as satisfying to her as it was to us. The delightful uncertainty as to just what her mood would be was one of the most beguiling things about her. It would seem from some of her notes that she enjoyed, at times, having us think that she fancied us all to be boys. She certainly had perception enough to know that this would be regarded as a compliment, at that early age, not

unwelcome to the feminine members of our ruffian band. One of the treasured bits of paper before me bears evidence of this graceful fiction. Whether it came to us in the basket, or by some other devious way, I do not remember. With an unerring instinct Miss Emily saw to it that her messages never came to us in a direct or conventional manner. This would have robbed them of half their significance and thrill. She was child enough herself to know that.

I fancy this note came after some unusually noisy or meddlesome escapade. It may well have been sent as balm for our injured feelings after reprimand by Lavinia or Maggie or some member of our own families. Though we dwelt beneath the shadow of genius, and felt in some uncertain fashion the charm of it, we were by no means subdued or docile children. As I recall the happenings of those years I am more and more impressed by the patience and consideration of the long-suf-

fering elders who were in our riotous orbit. As we confined our exploits to one somewhat restricted area, their reactions on the two Dickinson households must have been at times rather trying, though I fail to recall an instance of impatience or serious reprimand.

But there were times when we were a bit subdued, vaguely penitent, and Miss Emily had an uncanny knowledge of what transpired behind closed doors. Whatever the reason back of it, Miss Emily, on these occasions, arrayed herself unflinchingly on our side, and, as was her wont, declared herself our friend and ally and cheered us with her fragrant approval, for she said;

" Dear Boys,
" Please never grow up, which is ' much better — '
Please never improve — you are perfect now.
" Emily "

It is difficult to reproduce the peculiarities of her punctuation. She used dashes and very little else.

This gave to her briefest messages a sense of breathless spontaneity and genuineness. I have never seen written sentences that sounded, looked and felt so much like quick, impulsive, spoken words as hers. She speaks elsewhere of " seeing " a voice on a page instead of hearing it. You both saw and heard a voice when you read a line from her. What her method was in writing her poetry I do not know, but every scrap written by her that I have ever seen and handled betrays this same sense of haste to get the thing said while it was hot, to send the message before the fine edge of its significance should dull. There was no pose in this. It was the one and only possible answer to an imperious demand of her nature to express the thought that flashed, to utter the words that rose in her heart and trembled on her lips. To utter them just as quickly as possible and in the briefest imaginable form. This led to an extraordinary terseness and directness in her verse and letters, and

necessitated a careful choice of words. This choice was dictated more by instinct than by study, though she loved words and played with them, not with the cold calculation of a stylist, but in a passionate desire to use the one word which would express the subtlest shade of color, sense and meaning, which would translate for others the delicate fabric of her thought and emotion.

While Miss Emily was patient with and appreciative of the somewhat strident budding masculinity of some of the members of our outlaw band, she was singularly sensitive to the softer side of our feminine contingent and never failed to recognize it. While with the boys she was a comrade of the first rank, I think her affections went out to the girls even more tenderly and truly. Miss Emily was a woman before she was a poet. She was as truly feminine in all her reactions to life as any village matron importantly preoccupied with the affairs of home and church and town. Perhaps

more truly and penetratingly so because she lived so fully the life of the spirit. This led to a surprising responsiveness to mood or circumstance, a complete giving of herself to those she loved and a passionate desire to share the beauty of life and nature with them. In all this she was intensely feminine.

On occasion she would pay a pretty tribute to the girls with a grace and simplicity that betrays the depths of a woman's heart. What would inspire it no one could hazard a guess, — some strange prompting from the very center of her life, the flashing realization that in some trifling episode she saw the sweep of forces and a sense of destiny that a duller or more preoccupied mind would fail to notice. These tributes were often little letters, sometimes they were verse. A slender penciled message dropped from the blue into their hands, lacking any apparent connection with juvenile happenings. I have such a poem addressed to her niece, Mattie, and to my sister Did. How I would like to

know, at this late date, when she wrote it and why she wrote it.

Nothing with Miss Emily was haphazard, nothing was fortuitous. Unstudied and impulsive as her messages appeared to be, I know enough about some of them to realize that they sprang from very real causes and were vastly more significant than we could have possibly imagined them to be. She may have led a life of physical retirement — her body, in those days, did not venture far from home — but she possessed and used spiritual tentacles that searched out and knew the secrets and needs of the hearts about her. She felt more than most of those near her knew. So this little scrap of paper fell into the laps of two small girls, one of whom treasured it all her life.

LITTLE WOMEN
Which shall it be, Geraniums or Tulips?
The butterfly up in the sky that hasn't any name
And hasn't any tax to pay and hasn't any home
Is just as high as you and I, and higher, I believe,

So soar away and never sigh
For that's the way to grieve.[1]

This buoyant note of happiness was not an uncommon one with her. It always betrayed itself in her relation with the children. That was why we loved her. We could have felt all the vague emanations from a rare personality that could possibly have been felt. We could have been enamored of her appearance, and bewitched by her retired, and to us mysterious life, we could have eaten her ambrosial gingerbread, but we would never have loved her had she been a saddened and embittered woman in shuddering retirement from the world. She was a joyous person. Perhaps her other characteristics interested and allured us, but it was this that made us love her.

While she gave much to us, I am inclined to

[1] From "The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson." Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

think that we gave her something in exchange, something which meant a great deal to her. Our noise and gayety, our amusing and impossible enterprises, our constant imaginings were to Miss Emily a real source of pleasure. It was not the patronizing pleasure of a patient grown-up with children. It was the actual pleasure of a sympathetic participant, who saw in us intimations of a world she enjoyed inhabiting with us, and a world rich in much which we failed to see and understand but which had beauty and reality for her. She wanted us to be happy, helped to make us so and delighted in the fact that we were. There never were happier or more life-enthralled children than the little group that adored Miss Emily.

As with all her messages, it would be immensely interesting to know the occasion of this one, what episode caused it to be written, what emotion led to it. We can only guess at this late date. Some ebullition of happiness or the felicitous outcome of

some enterprise led her to write to my sister and me:

"HAPPY DID AND MAC;

"We can offer you nothing so charming as your own Hearts, which we would seek to possess had we the requisite wiles."

This, like many of her messages, was unsigned. There was no need to sign a name to them. It was not difficult to identify anything that came from her. It had a character of its own and was unlike anything else in the world of letters. In the first place no one wrote a hand like Miss Emily. I have heard it said that her writing changed greatly with the years, but all the letters I have ever seen, covering a considerable period, are much the same in appearance.

In them all every letter is separate and alone, standing bravely by itself as if it were ready to assume all the responsibility of being where it is. The words are far apart, sometimes not more than

two or three on a line, and she made free use of capital letters, a thing we noticed with delight, as it defied all the rules of the copy books with which we were familiar. Yet with all these aids to the eye her writing was often very difficult to decipher. I have a letter in my collection in which after all these years there are two words that still elude me. The context does not always aid, for Miss Emily used words as a lapidary uses stones. She chose them for their color and brilliancy as well as for their conventional meaning and put them in the setting that most became them. She was an artist with words as she was with phrases and metaphors.

Miss Emily watched her calendar jealously. Life was to her a thrilling, a stupendous experience, and each day was a precious thing, from the glory of the morning to the pensive beauty of the evening. She was fond of what Lowell called "the robin-haunted dusk" and every hour had its message.

Some tiny incident was wont to mark a day with rare significance for her. Birthdays, anniversaries and the festivals of village life were never forgotten. She seemed to watch with intense, and almost tragic interest, to see what life brought to those she loved. Christmas was to her a day of deep and beautiful meaning. Among my letters I find one to my sister acknowledging some little remembrance. It is as characteristic of Miss Emily as her attitude toward the children and toward nature as anything she ever wrote.

Miss Emily never wrote down to the children. She had none of that annoying literary condescension toward them that many have. She met them on their own ground with a frank equality of communion that they felt and recognized. She wrote to them on their own terms and with charming intimacy, but in her own manner.

No child could have failed to treasure such a letter as this:

"DEAR DID;

"Atmospherically it was the most beautiful Christmas on record. The hens came to the door with Santa Claus, the pussies washed themselves in the open air without chilling their tongues, and Santa Claus — sweet old gentleman — was even gallanter than usual. Visitors from the chimney were a new dismay, but all of them brought their hands so full and behaved so sweetly only a churl could have turned them away. And then the ones at the barn were so happy! Maggie gave the hens a check for potatoes, each of the cats had a gilt-edged bone, and the horse had a new blanket from Boston.

"Do you remember dark-eyed Mr. Dickinson, who used to shake your hand when it was so little it had hardly a stem? He, too, had a beautiful gift of roses from a friend away.

"It was a lovely Christmas. But what made you remember me? Tell me with a kiss — or is it a secret?

"EMILY"

And this is the person the world sometimes fancies a disconsolate wraith of a woman living a life of solitary and morbid sorrow.

The " dark-eyed Mr. Dickinson " of this letter was her father, Edward Dickinson, who died the June before the Christmas this was written. With characteristic simplicity, roses sent to his memory she described as a gift to him from " a friend away." She marshals the whole household in her picture, Maggie, the cats, the chickens, the faithful horse in the barn, an intimate friend of all the children, even the swallows in the broad-throated New England chimney, and to Miss Emily in her chamber, feeling the wonder of it all, it was a " lovely Christmas."

There was a constant exchange of gifts between Miss Emily and her young friends. We knew the things she loved best and we sought the early wild flowers, a flaming leaf, a glistening stone, the shining, fallen feather of a bird and took them to her, sure of her appreciation of the gift as well as the giving. In thanking one of us for a gift she wrote:

" Will the sweet child who sent me the butter-

flies, herself a member of the same ethereal nation, accept a rustic kiss, flavored, we trust with clover?

"AMHERST"

The gift of butterflies must have been a card with butterflies upon it, for it would have been a brave child who would have given her a real butterfly, even if slain and mounted in the most humane and scientific manner. Miss Emily was not interested in specimens; butterflies were to her only joyous living things, and we knew it and concealed from her any scientific tendencies we ever had.

This is the only note of hers I have ever seen signed "Amherst." But she had a whimsical habit of using the name of the town as a signature, and on occasions she alludes to herself as "Amherst", in letters to older friends. I have often thought that there might have been a touch of conscious irony in this. Miss Emily had no illusions in regard to herself, and that one of the least known and most inconspicuous of Amherst's townspeople

should elect to use its name as a nom-de-plume probably amused her and gratified an elfish sense of the incongruous which was characteristic of her. In the light of later developments this use of the name has a certain piquancy. Miss Emily's fame to-day, a hundred years after her birth, has made Amherst mean more to the world than ever before.

In my small packet of children's letters but one remains. It is addressed to my sister. It may be the latest of them all. I do not know. My sister was never known as anything but " Did " through her entire childhood. She and Miss Emily's niece, Mattie, were inseparable companions. They were very different in character and temperament, and their relationship, rooted in a very real and affectionate devotion, was at times a bit tempestuous. Miss Emily, upon whom nothing was ever lost, and with whom all things were as an open book as far as human relationships were concerned, saw and was amused by this little conflict of personalities.

She conceived the idea of calling them "Katy-Did" and "Katy-Didn't" and often used these names in writing a joint letter to them. The fidelity to truth of these names was not overlooked by even the youngest of us. In this little note she uses for the first and only time the more formal name of Sally. It is probably one of the latest of them all, because it accompanied a gift of roses, a more mature offering than most of them. She says;

"DEAR SALLY,

"Do you allow any roses to compete with your own? Unfortunately these are stemless.

"EMILY"

I am amused to notice that all through these notes on our childhood relations with this rare woman I have unconsciously dropped into the old habit of referring to her as "Miss Emily." How subtle these fine distinctions are. She was always "Miss Emily" to us, though we were on the most intimate terms with her. She was "Miss Emily" to

many or the older people. She was constantly referred to as such in our hearing in the casual talk of our homes. Yet Lavinia was "Lavinia" or "Vinnie" to all. Only on occasions was she "Miss Vinnie." What was the reason back of this nice distinction? I think it was that, even in those days, every one felt Miss Emily's genius. Not that it set her apart in any real sense, but it marked her and gave her a distinction that was reflected in the way we spoke of her in our daily talk. While her circle of intimates was not large, it was probably as large as the circle of really intimate friends with any one else. The only difference lay in the fact that outside of this circle Miss Emily did not cumber herself with acquaintances who gave her nothing and to whom she could give nothing. I suspect that she felt with Emerson that society, that is too many contacts, "dissipated her force." She certainly gave to her intimate friendships a tremendous sense of vitality and vigor.

Another trick of speech comes back to me. The Edward Dickinson house was always "The Mansion." It was a large house for its day, but not larger than many others in the town. It was no more elegant than the Austin Dickinson house and certainly not as attractive in outward appearance. Yet it was always "The Mansion" to old and young alike. There seemed to be some quality about it that made it stand a bit aloof, a bit above the others. It may have been because a distinguished and much respected man lived in it. And it may have gained this quality, in a measure too, from the fact that in an upper chamber this distinguished man's daughter was watching and loving the world about her and breathing into it something of her own beauty and truthfulness. I am inclined to think the daughter made the house a mansion quite as much as the father.

Across the street from the Austin Dickinson house stood the village parsonage, the home of my

early childhood and still fragrant with happy memories. It stood in a square with the gray stone church surrounded on all four sides by village streets. The church was an unusual structure for that period in so small a town. An unpretentious but attractive building with a graceful spire and dignified interior. This church was the outward evidence of the sense, good taste and forcefulness of Austin Dickinson. Whoever else was on the "building committee" it was Austin Dickinson who built that church and parsonage. He and my father were the best and closest of friends. A relation of peculiar tenderness existed between them. Never were two men more dissimilar in character and appearance. The church was built during the early years of my father's pastorate and he found Austin Dickinson a tower of strength in all parish matters. During its construction services were held in one of the college buildings. It was during this period that Miss Emily was attending church

and mixing in the social activities of the town and college. It was in this somber little building that she first began to place, on occasion, bouquets of flowers in the pews of her more intimate friends. Their color and fragrance did much, I am sure, to dispel the depressing effect of the somewhat austere surroundings, and added a touch of private intimacy and interest to the ritual of public worship that certainly did it no harm. This practice she continued for some time, and when she no longer attended the services, the devoted Lavinia would bear her offerings and place them as directed. Surely Miss Emily's spiritual tentacles were not developed by her life of retirement, they were in existence and in use long before she ceased to be seen in public.

While Austin Dickinson was a tower of strength to my father, he was an overshadowing figure in my life as a boy. I never could decide which was the more remarkable, Austin Dickinson as he

strode fearlessly through life or his sister Miss Emily in her comparative solitude. As I remember Austin Dickinson, he was a tall, slender, commanding figure crowned by a broad-brimmed hat worn a bit on one side and giving a peculiar dashing air to his somewhat martial bearing. He had a voice like thunder when he wished to use it, and use it he did on occasions.

There were two gates into the Austin Dickinson place, giving from the street. A dozen times a day I would enter one of them in search of my playmates or on some errand. I always elected to enter the one farthest away from the path leading up the steps to the front door. It was not timidity that led me to do this; it was a wise precaution. The gates were heavy and the latches high. The gates were not easy to open and they were still more difficult to close. I often neglected to do so, either from inability or from oversight.

If this happened, I was almost certain to hear a

stentorian voice in the distance saying in accents none too mild, "Boy, shut that gate." It was Austin Dickinson in the garden or on the piazza who had observed me and the open gate.

No voice ever affected me, in the past, as that voice did. I shall never hear in the future a voice which will fill me with such awe. Not that it was harsh or angry, for it was neither; but it was the enormous volume of it and the tone of authority that rang in it. I know one thing. If I am ever fortunate enough to approach the pearly gate of heaven, I shall take great pains, in the hush of that awful moment, to close the gate carefully and noiselessly behind me. For if I do not, I know Austin Dickinson will be there to see me, and from some remote corner that voice will thunder through the dome of heaven the well-remembered words, "Boy, shut that gate." I know now that he watched me scurry back to my neglected duty with a twinkle in those deep-set, burning eyes, but I

only heard the voice in those days. I did not see the twinkle or know that it was there. Austin Dickinson shared with his sister Emily a love of every growing thing. He loved and cared for his trees and shrubs with skill and devotion. He knew an immense deal about them and he spent most of his leisure time among them. It was from the vantage point of the garden that he saw us children go and come. He was never annoyed by us, but he had one or two rules which were not to be disregarded, and a swinging gate was to him a lax and shiftless thing and not to be tolerated.

My father differed greatly from Austin Dickinson in appearance; he was dark of hair and skin and bubbling with the sheer fun of living. I never knew a human being who enjoyed life more. Every moment enthralled him. He had a keen sense of humor, a quick wit and a dashing manner not usual in a Congregational clergyman of that period. He was a student and a reader, but I have

always thought that his one absorbing interest was human life and experience, and his one great gift was a power to meet and know and understand his fellow human beings. He and Austin Dickinson had much in common, and were deeply devoted to each other. My mother, a gentle, whimsical person, was my father's peer in fun and buoyancy and intellectual alertness. Mrs. Dickinson, dark, commanding, highly accomplished and quick of wit and tongue completed a remarkable quartette. Between those two houses ran electric currents of mutual understanding, quick response and ardent affection.

What glorious times they had behind the privacy of those high hedges. What peals of laughter we children heard when the older children were together. What matchless hours were spent away from the official tedium of town and college and from the cramping influence of New England religious conventionalities. It was into this house

and into such company that Miss Emily would venture on occasion. It was a short journey across the lawn between "The Mansion" and her brother's house. A winding path between the trees made the way easy. It was this path that she described as "wide enough for two who love", and over it her white figure would dart when the mood to visit was upon her. If she did not join the company, she could well hear the laughter from her chamber window.

Austin and Sue, John and Sarah were as definite a group as Ned, Mattie, Did and Mac, and I am inclined to think they enjoyed life quite as much. Traditions persist to this day of parties, and impromptu gatherings and masquerades, in the simple fashion of the day, that do not seem to accord with the accepted notions of the times in regard to professional decorum or official dignity.

Between Miss Emily and her brother Austin a very tender affection existed, but I think the one

person who understood her best in those days and felt the beauty and reality of her work most clearly was her brother's wife, her sister-in-law Sue. It was she who first won Miss Emily's shy confidence enough to be permitted to see her early poems; it was she who permitted the first publication of one of them, and it was to her that Miss Emily instinctively turned for intellectual sympathy. On one occasion at least Miss Emily submitted some verses to her for criticism and made such changes as her sister-in-law suggested. Such a relationship between a sister and her brother's wife is not so common as to permit it to be passed over without comment. The others in the older circle felt her genius too, and often spoke of it, but it was Sue who, from the first, was her literary confidant.

Miss Emily's attitude with this group of older people was not unlike that with the children. While she was very close to them, she was not of them. She was a somewhat shadowy figure on the

perimeter of the circle, always felt and appreciated but always a bit detached and distant. On occasions she would appear among them, but only for a moment. More often she would make her presence felt by a written message. These messages betray a surprising knowledge of and sympathy with the tiny happenings in the circle of people she knew best and loved most.

This habit of written messages was not an eccentric whim. It had its origin in very practical conditions. Hardly a day passed that her sister-in-law did not go to " The Mansion " and have a few words with her. They talked of intimate and private matters, and a habit was formed of meeting in a small hallway on the second floor. Even here, however, they were apt to be interrupted. Sue was the mother of a growing family, she ran what was, in those days, a large establishment, there were many guests and her days were full of practical exactions. When Miss Emily had something

to say she wanted to say it at once. She knew that a word of affection, encouragement or sympathy was more precious at the right moment than an hour later. So she formed the habit of sending hurried little notes across the lawn by any one of many young messengers always near at hand. This method was a convenient one for her busy sister-in-law, and she too adopted it. It was quite natural that Miss Emily should have come to include other members of the family as well, and to have extended her informal correspondence to her other friends. There were hundreds of such notes, and if they had all been preserved they would throw a very clear light on the life and character of this remarkable woman. They would serve to reveal too the depth and reality of Sue's character. She was a woman scarcely less remarkable in many ways than Miss Emily herself.

Probably the last words Miss Emily ever committed to paper was a brief message to Sue in an-

swer to some inquiry. She said: "Dear Su— My answer is an unmitigated Yes. Emily." I have often wondered what the question was. It would be illuminating to know.

Miss Emily's relations with my father were most unusual for that day and generation. He was not only her friend and an intimate of her family, but he was her pastor. That is, he was her pastor if any one could be said to have occupied such a position with so elusive and so unconventional a parishioner. Miss Emily grew up in an era of stern orthodoxy, and her parents were entirely conventional in their attitude toward religious questions.

At one time her father felt that she needed guidance in spiritual matters. To my father fell the doubtful privilege of providing this guidance. Never neglectful of a duty, he undertook what he must have known was a thankless task. There was in my father a strain of liberalism and broad-

mindedness many decades ahead of his time. I am quite sure that, in his heart, he thought Miss Emily rather less in need of spiritual light than any person he knew.

What that interview was no one ever knew, but it is not difficult to see the picture. In the semi-darkness of a New England "parlor" sat two people. One, a devout and earnest Christian gentleman in the early forties, in whose dark eyes lurked flashes of amusement at his own discomfiture, and about whose lips must have come betraying smiles. He was talking sincerely, simply and earnestly as was his wont, but he was probably using the accepted phrases of a conventional religious formula. He was using them partly from habit, partly for purposes of self-defense.

Opposite him, on a prim haircloth sofa, sat a woman only a few years younger, dressed in white, with nervous, sensitive hands and disconcerting eyes. She was politely listening. She spoke but

little, then briefly, incisively and to the point. There must have lurked in her expressive face a faint suggestion of amusement at the utter incongruity of the situation, but she was far too urbane a person to have betrayed it. I have no doubt she parted from her friend and pastor on terms of the frankest friendship and mutual understanding. I have no doubt that beneath the hackneyed phrases employed, messages had been exchanged that left each in perfect sympathy with the other.

All that is really known is that my father reported to the perplexed parent that Miss Emily was "sound", and let it go at that. And the irony of the whole incident lay in the fact that a clean bill of spiritual health was, to Miss Emily, one of the least important things in the world, and to her spiritual physician the conferring of it one of the most unnecessary and needless things he ever did.

While her pastor and the village parsonage were not to Miss Emily the source of religious and spirit-

ual inspiration in the accepted sense of those days, they were a very vital part of her life. From them both she drew refreshment, and for both she felt an ardent and abiding affection. She watched the goings and comings of the family. When my father was absent a message would always come to my mother. One of these lies before me. She says:

> "The Absence of the Big Brother is a Temptation to shield the little Sister, were not she herself a sufficing one.
>
> "EMILY"

Miss Emily recognized the pastoral relation with my father, and I have often wondered if it were not after the memorable interview that she began to address her notes to my father and mother, "Mr. and Mrs. Pastor" and sometimes "Mr. and Mrs. Clergyman." It would be like her to so have made amends for her slightly pagan attitude on a certain

occasion by some such delicate insinuation as this manner of address might suggest.

Much has been said and written of her feeling for and sympathy with nature. She had no scientific interest in it whatever. Nature was to her not a series of interesting and instructive phenomena, it was an abiding presence. It was part of her life. In it she found her most happy analogies and the greatest spiritual solace her soul knew. She used it, too, as a means of expressing to her friends her sympathy and devotion. Flowers and other bits of growing things were symbols she used freely and with unerring taste.

Sometimes she allowed the gift to speak for itself, sometimes it was accompanied by the briefest message. A gift of a flower to my mother brought with it a word of appreciation for some small act of kindness to Lavinia. She said:

" Whose tenderness to my own Sister, constrains me to cherish her's.

" EMILY "

Another in which she used " Mr. and Mrs. Clergyman " appears penciled on a scrap of paper sent with flowers:

" For Mr. and Mrs. Clergyman with confiding love."

This love of nature was a vital part of her life and she seemed to have a passion to share it with her friends. She had to feel certain, however, that the friend was one who would sense the significance of her gift and understand its meaning.

Sometimes she overestimated the capacity of a friend to see the significance of her offering with results that she herself would have found as amusing as others always did. The Edward Dickinson establishment, even before the days of Miss Emily's fame, was unlike any other. It had a character

and bore a stamp which set it apart from any other house in the village. While its hospitable doors were open and there was much that made it an agreeable place to visit, it was not approached casually or without due regard for the formalities. Miss Emily received many visitors from her circle of more intimate friends but they would come, more often than not, by appointment and such a visit was always more or less of an occasion for them.

One memorable afternoon an elderly lady much loved in Amherst called on Miss Emily. She lived some distance from the Dickinson house and being in the neighborhood she dropped in unexpectedly. She was met by Maggie and conducted to the garden. Everything possible was done for her comfort, and Maggie departed to tell Miss Emily that her friend was there. Time passed and the faithful Maggie did not return. The dear lady possessed her soul in patience, walked about among

the flowers — and waited. Presently Maggie returned, a bit flushed and a little more militant in manner than usual.

She said, "Miss Emily is very sorry but she cannot see you this afternoon. She is very sorry, but it is impossible and she has asked me to give you this."

She thrust forward a tiny silver tray upon which, on a spotless doily, lay a single white clover. The dear lady took it and her departure with equal bewilderment. Coming as she did, without appointment or warning, she was not in the least disturbed by the fact that Miss Emily did not see her. That was not unusual and was quite in character. What did perplex her was the single white clover. It meant nothing to her, but curiously enough, she treasured it all the rest of her life.

I would like to know what happened above stairs. I can see Miss Emily smilingly obdurate. The mood was not right, she was writing possibly,

and that particular hour was precious; at any rate she was not to be disturbed and she would not come down.

Maggie adored Miss Emily but she had no great patience with the whims of genius and she had a tongue in her head. She had a high regard for the prestige of the Dickinson family and a feeling for the niceties of social intercourse. It was a battle. Sharp, short and decisive, and Maggie met defeat as she often did. With all her racial and vocal equipment she was no match for Miss Emily. Again "the wren prevailed." I fancy more to placate Maggie than from any feeling of necessity, she wrote a line of greeting to her friend which amply compensated for her fruitless visit.

There have been many analogies found between Miss Emily and Emerson, in their writing, in their lives and in their philosophy. Of the correctness of these I am not competent to judge, but I certainly see a striking kinship between Emerson in

Concord, defying family and friends and the world itself with "Whim" posted on his study door, closed tight and firmly locked, and Miss Emily triumphant in her skirmish with Maggie at the threshold of her chamber door while, below in the garden, her friend waited.

Her floral offerings were not always, however, as simple as a solitary clover. Her garden was to her the source of constant joy, and on it she lavished the most affectionate care and attention. I have often seen her there. She sometimes stood on an old red army blanket when the ground was damp, and frequently kneeled on it to reach her flowers.

This has given rise to a tradition that she kept a roll of red carpet which she had put down on all her visits to her garden and invariably used. In the hands of the myth-maker this old red blanket has become a symbol of Miss Emily and her detachment from the world. It has been elaborated into a story that after her retirement from the world

she never stepped on the ground. This is, of course, absurd, as her visits to her brother's house proves, though I am surprised that the old blanket has not grown large enough to reach from one house to the other, for the purposes of legend.

This is an instance, however, of the inevitable rise of elaborate stories which have the slenderest foundation of fact, and illustrates how easy it is to confuse actual remembrances with the minutia of a mythology which had already begun to gather about her, even in those early days. It is indeed the object of this slender volume to dispel, if possible, some of this cloud of fable and to make Miss Emily a more human and more understandable person. I have tried in all my recollections of her to substantiate what I think I remember by the testimony of others.

Whatever may be the merits of the unimportant matter of the carpet, the fact remains that she spent much of her time among her flowers. When

the mood inspired, or she wanted to make a more elaborate offering, she would construct, with dainty skill, a bouquet in the formal manner of the day. A great variety of flowers, close-pressed together and looking, when completed, like one bit of exotic and unusual bloom.

On one occasion a friend received a more formal and more elaborate bouquet than usual, with a line of admonition in regard to one flower. Upon examination, and the removal of this flower, a tiny note was found wound around the stem, carefully concealed from view. The construction of the bouquet, the careful concealing of the note and the hint as to its whereabouts, must have been the labor of hours, but time, attention and thought meant nothing to her when she was attempting to give something of herself to others.

To some, many of the things Miss Emily did might appear to be only the mild eccentricities of an idle woman. But Miss Emily was neither mild

nor eccentric, and least of all was she idle. She was certainly more enthralled in the technique of living than most of her contemporaries, and felt, as none of them did, the beauty and the mystery of it all. She expressed herself in perhaps unusual, but always felicitous ways, because her whole nature was sensitized to the hidden springs of life, but she was no more eccentric, in the common meaning of the word, than the roses in her garden were eccentric in not resembling hollyhocks. She was only a rare and beautiful type of human flower.

No one who knew her could lay at her door the charge of idleness. With every moment of her life a vibrant experience, with the whole world of nature and human life crying out to her in terms of perfect understanding, she was occupied incessantly in meeting the demands of her nature and satisfying them. Many of these demands were subtle but imperious mandates, unfamiliar to most

of us; but many were the simple, normal expression of human necessities and desires.

The children knew that Miss Emily was a fountain of whimsical humor. Her notes to them, particularly to her beloved nephew and niece, were full of it. No event was too trifling for her to see the humor in it and distill the last drop. The sting of a hornet or other accident brought at once a message from her full of fun and sympathy.

The exploits of childhood are not governed by the proprieties, and in our rich and varied lives we often found that we encountered certain practical realities. There were episodes that were not calculated to evoke the interest or the amused sympathy of a cloistered poet unless she be a very human and understanding person. Such a one is a milestone in my memories.

In those days the equipment for the disposal of

rubbish was primitive. Each spring there was dug on the Edward Dickinson place a huge hole, and into it the winter's accumulation of rubbish was dumped, at least such portion of it as could not be burned. Such a hole had been dug and was half full of a varied collection of tin cans, old vegetables and the like. While the disposal of the winter rubbish was in process, we were warned and instructed to avoid the hole. We were expressly forbidden to go near it. But it had for us a fatal fascination. We took a strange and morbid interest in the things that were so soon to be irrevocably put away beneath the earth.

This spring the work was interrupted by frequent rains and the hole became filled with dirty water. We were again warned to keep away until it could be drained and covered. Of course we disregarded all instructions and on one of our excursions, finding the water level with the ground, at once used it as a pond to sail our boats on.

It was Mattie's misfortune to venture too far and she fell in. None of the boys of our band were present except myself and I was too young to be of any assistance. My sister flew to her rescue and, holding tight to her clothing, made the quiet of "The Evergreens" ring with cries for help. Succor came just as my sister's strength was failing and Mattie was rescued without serious damage except to her clothing. Wisely enough, the incident was allowed to pass without further discipline and my sister basked for days in the warmth of accredited heroism. Either by accident or design there was a gathering at the Edward Dickinson house that evening and the occasion was marked by a tribute to my sister from Miss Emily upon whom the humor of the whole incident was not lost. Our disobedience, Mattie's discomfiture and her rescue appealed to the fun and mischief which were such important elements in Miss Emily's unusual personality, although the details of the episode were

not such as to inspire the muse of a saddened poet, as the world sometimes pictures her.

So it was in her relations with her older friends. She seemed to be on the alert to pass along to them anything that would enliven or amuse. She read the newspapers and enjoyed the immense amount of solemn nonsense that appeared in them. She made quick and accurate estimates of public men and political events.

She had known social life in Washington, and understood a good many of the forces at work there. She numbered among her friends many distinguished people and carried on an active correspondence with many of them. At least one journalist of national reputation exchanged views with her, and she was quite able to meet him and others on their own ground. In her reading she would often happen on something that amused her. It would be the work of an instant to cut it out, write a line of ironic comment and send it off

to the one friend who would appreciate it. Of course, it is her poetic genius which will make her a great figure in the world of letters, but the other phases of her beautiful and sympathetic character are vastly important and the world is in danger of overlooking them. Her intensely feminine and ardently human attributes make tenable the very reasonable theory that no man or woman can achieve real artistic greatness who is not fundamentally human and sympathetic with everyday human life and experience. This Miss Emily certainly was to an extraordinary degree.

There never was a warmer, more human personality than that of her sister-in-law Sue, and it was to her that the whole beauty and nobility of Miss Emily's character turned. The bond that existed between these two women was probably, in many ways, the most powerful influence in the lives of both of them. While her poems betray Miss Emily to be a great artist in her portrayal of

the deeper emotions of life, she was any woman's peer in the lighter and more casual relationships. She was, too, an artist in the amenities of living; humor, a light touch, deftness at the give and take of life and quick perception of its more subtle satires. All these Miss Emily had and used.

One of her explorations into the items of less importance in a newspaper led to the discovery of the following bit of news. She cut it out and despatched it to the parsonage by the earliest available messenger.

"John Jenkins, hailing from Philadelphia, was arrested at Baltimore yesterday on a charge of passing counterfeit half and quarter-dollar pieces, and two hundred pieces of counterfeit coin were found on his person. It is suspected that he is employed by a gang of counterfeiters."

This clipping Miss Emily sent along with this comment:

"Dear Friends:

"You have our sympathy. When an old friend like the Decalogue turns his back on us, who then can we trust? "Emily"

In 1878 my father accepted a call to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and severed his connection with the church in Amherst. It must have been a very difficult question for him to decide. It meant not only leaving a parish where he had many friends, but it meant leaving the charmed circle of intimates clustering about the village church. For the children in his family it was an epoch-making event. The excitement of a projected moving, the speculation in regard to our future home, and the novelty of seeing our possessions packed and carted away thrilled us as nothing had before. But there were very real regrets. We seemed to feel instinctively that we would never again know such a playground as we had enjoyed, and that we would

never have such comrades, and we never did. It meant too that we were to leave Miss Emily and all the charm and mystery of her friendship.

The departure of my father and mother was a real sorrow to all the Dickinsons, in both houses, and to Miss Emily I think it was a poignant grief. She was, however, one of those rare persons to whom geographical miles meant little. To her there was little difference between the width of a village street and half the Commonwealth between Amherst and Pittsfield.

She could love and cherish her friends with equal warmth were they by her side or were they miles away. She had made the intangibles in life so real that they were no longer intangible. She had learned the secret that clasped hands are but the outward and visible sign of united hearts and affections, separated if need be by continents and oceans. She could love them and follow them day by day, though the eye might not see or the hand

touch them. Her messages could reach them now as well as before.

It was during the early years of my father's residence in Pittsfield that Miss Emily kept most closely in touch with our family. She continued to send her characteristic messages and gifts. During these years too my sister and I grew to a more mature appreciation of her. Frequent visits between the families kept them closely in touch, and while we lost Miss Emily as a playmate, we began to understand more clearly the significance of her life and character.

In Amherst, and in her family, there was a growing appreciation of the rare quality of her unique notes. Sue and others were saving them and even Emily herself had made a shy and somewhat ambiguous confession, in an intimate note, of an ambition "to make Austin and Sue proud of her someday." This was probably a period of considerable literary activity though few, if any, knew

or even suspected it. Certainly it was not until after our departure from Amherst that I really began to know Miss Emily.

After the family was settled in Pittsfield my father returned to Amherst for a few days to attend to last details. He stayed with the Austin Dickinsons and saw Miss Emily. I have often wondered if he made any allusion to the historic interview, or to the fact that his laborious pastoral duties with her would now be inherited by his successor. It would have been like him to do so.

It was on this occasion that the episode of the cat occurred which was for years the cause of much amusement between the families. The cat belonged to my sister. I was the proud possessor of a goat. For some reason I had always felt that life was incomplete without one, and I had possessed many. One of my earlier pets had become so violently attached to me that he protested at an hour's separation. This was inconvenient, for the church

and parsonage were close together, and when I was reluctantly dragged to attend divine worship, and the goat had to pass an hour or two away from me he protested. His protests were vocal and persistent. In summer they were distinctly audible in the church, and my father, humorous and loving as he was, found it difficult to conduct a church service with dignity, to the constant bleating of a lonely and distracted goat. It was as bad at other seasons of the year when scholastic duties took me from his side.

My father then executed a flank movement. I recall it because it was the first incident in my life that shook for a moment my juvenile faith in the absolute fairness and good faith of my beloved parent. On a visit to Boston my father saw in the shop of Mr. Schwartz, of fragrant memory, a huge rocking-horse, covered with real hair and resplendent in gaudy trappings. Upon his return he proposed a trade, — a rocking-horse for a goat. I

proved faithless to my beloved one and accepted the offer. I can only say in extenuation of my weakness that, even at that early age, I had a passion for horses, from Stebbins' piebald four to the humblest imitation in wood or plaster. This weakness has followed me all my life and has been well-nigh my undoing. No time was wasted, and almost immediately the horse arrived and the goat departed. That was the only horse I have ever seen, either real or imitation, that failed to thrill me. I hated that horse from the moment I saw the goat led away to distant pastures. I admitted that his silence in my absence might be an advantage to the neighborhood, but the prancing, wooden abomination had no charms for me.

It was not long, however, before an indulgent parent allowed another goat to appear and to remain with me during good behavior. This one was a less demonstrative animal and never raised his voice in protest when I left him. It was he who

was my pet when the great journey to Pittsfield impended. I was disconcerted when I learned that he was not to accompany the family in its move to a new home, but the fine edge of my goat devotion had dulled and I allowed him to be disposed of with no more than normal pangs.

But the cat was quite another matter. She was torn from my sister's arms a dozen times to be transported to happy and congenial surroundings elsewhere, only to return to the disordered parsonage at the most inconvenient of hours. On the day of the family's departure all was ready. Then it was discovered that my sister was missing. After a long search she was discovered, bathed in tears, huddled on the kitchen steps of the parsonage, with her beloved cat clasped to her bosom. Once more the cat was transported, this time to a remote friend who promised to keep her in restraint for a time, my sister was placated by a promise of an early visit, and all was well.

On my father's return to Amherst he found, to his dismay, that the cat had again returned to the parsonage and was in solitary possession of it. Distrustful of his intentions, she kept aloof and would not allow herself to be captured. Busy with other matters, he finished his business and returned to Pittsfield. While on the train he suddenly had a vision of the cat neglected and possibly starving. He decided to telegraph instructions in regard to it to the faithful sexton of the church.

This sexton was another of the heroes of my boyhood and the object of much frank, open-eyed curiosity on the part of all the youngsters. He was the first man I had ever seen who wore a glass eye. He also wore a very curious wig, but the eye was what fascinated me. Moreover he had at one period engaged in a Homeric battle of fisticuffs with the local bully and come off victorious. This had endeared him to every boy in the village, and made him to me an epic figure.

It was to him that my father determined to send a message in regard to the disposition of the cat. He telegraphed him briefly and to the point, " Give the cat to a merciful person." The wire was received, but Horace was puzzled. It contained instructions which he felt were beyond the ability of a church sexton to perform with satisfaction to all concerned. As was the habit in Amherst at that time, all questions which any citizen, no matter how humble, could not handle himself, were immediately submitted to the kindly and wise discretion of the " Squire ", as Austin Dickinson was affectionately called. This the perplexed sexton proceeded to do, with an inquiry as to " just what the Parson meant." The message as the Squire read it was: " Give the cat to a musical person." I can imagine the light in his eyes and his thunderous laughter when he saw it.

The message in its garbled form had certain implications which were not lost on the Squire. He

had always been greatly interested in church music, as he was in all artistic matters, and he and my father had done much to improve and enrich the music in the village church. On his visits to Pittsfield in later years I recall the laughter that the episode created. Mr. Dickinson always professed to believe that my father sent the message as it was received as a sly parting shot, reminiscent of some friendly differences of opinion on musical matters. Confident that the bewildered Horace would refer it to the Squire and he would see it.

My father always stoutly maintained that the message was wrongly transmitted and that Horace, who, beneath an abnormally serious exterior, was a bit of a wag, saw a chance to score one on the Squire. He was in a position to know something of whatever slight disagreement might have existed. This element of good-natured banter was a conspicuous element in the relations of the two

families in all their branches and it was something in which Miss Emily was an adept.

When my father's visit to the Austin Dickinsons, which culminated in the cat episode, came to an end, Miss Emily, watching the small happenings about her, sent off a message to my mother. It must have been sent almost at once after my father left. It was one of two only in which she makes direct allusion to religious matters or to the fruits of my father's ministry in Amherst. She said:

" It will make today more home-like that he who first made Heaven home-like to Father, is with his children.

" EMILY "

This little message has a quaint significance. She was right in implying that her father's conception of Heaven, whatever else it might be, was not " home-like ", and I am sure this little tribute to my father's success in softening the austere theol-

ogy of this sober man was appreciated. It was, too, another indirect palliation of whatever qualms she felt in regard to my father's pastoral efforts with her. I have said that she was sensitive to the relations of those about her. She had curious powers of divination in regard to many things. She knew the depth and power of emotions that were jealously guarded by those who felt them. Her brother, Austin, was a man who certainly did not wear his heart upon his sleeve. There never was, in many ways, a more reserved man. Few people, if any, realized the tenderness of the relation that existed between him and my father, but Miss Emily sensed it and felt it, and understood it.

When the day came that her brother was to leave Amherst to make his first visit to us in our new home, Miss Emily knew better than any one else what it meant to him. I knew Austin Dickinson well enough to feel convinced that any trace of impatience to be away, any apparent boyish antici-

pation of pleasures in store, would be sternly hidden and repressed. But he was being watched by eyes sensitive to things unseen and followed by a heart filled with sisterly devotion and understanding. I like to think of this strong man, valise in hand, striding to the little country station, for people walked short distances in those simple days. Everything Austin Dickinson did he did with a certain slight defiance of manner, a proud independence of mien that set him apart from smaller men. So that day he was just a shade more defiant, a bit more proudly independent than usual because there was a queer uncertainty in the beat of his heart, a quicker cadence in his pulse and a brighter light in his eye. Like a girl on her way to a tryst with her lover, it must be casual, it must be like any other errand lest the world suspect.

He had to pass his father's house. I wonder if he knew that some one in an upper window was watching him. I wonder if he tried to deceive

even his beloved Emily. If he did he failed, for a telltale little message followed him and betrayed his secret. As he passed down the street she watched him with a smile and then went swiftly to her writing table and with pencil wrote these revealing words to my mother:

"Hope they are with each other. Never saw a little Boy going Home to Thanksgiving so happy as Austin when he passed the door.

"EMILY"

This is an instance of her almost telegraphic brevity in communicating with her friends, her power to condense into the fewest possible words a message of very real and very rare importance. It illustrates too her habit of sympathetic observation and her alertness to everything that remotely touched the charmed circle in which she lived.

I have one priceless treasure in the form of a scrap of paper with five words written on it by

Miss Emily. It seems to me to represent more perfectly than anything I have ever seen from her hand the governing impulse of all her literary work, as well as the philosophic basis of her life and experience. What the history of this brief message is I do not know. I suspect it followed a member of our family to Pittsfield with some small gift of remembrance. It is, as usual, undated. In this case the signature is also lacking and, in its place, appears a delicate line an inch in length. It was not unusual for her notes to lack a signature, but all the others I have seen bore the name Emily or " Amherst ", if signed at all. Why this briefest of all her communications should have been signed with a blank line it is hard to say.

The message reads:

" Area — no test of depth."

That is all, but in the light of what the world

knows to-day of Emily Dickinson, it is a revealing utterance. Certainly there was no great physical area to her life. Her terrestrial orbit was the tiniest, but how vast it was in its emotional and spiritual sweep. How deep down the roots of her being went and how she drank at hidden fountains. Her whole history shows the purposeful intensity of a quickened and understanding soul contrasted with the futility of a far-flung, complicated, complex and incoherent physical existence. Again we find kinship with Emerson in his caustic comment on travel, and his contempt for the spiritual nomad. To him Boston Light meant as much as the Parthenon, and Amherst and her garden, her chamber, her books and a few friends meant as much to her as the capitals of Europe. Her surroundings were an ample arena for the exercise of her peculiar talents, and she found in them all the elements that were needed to make life interesting and satisfying. But that was her peculiar talent, denied most of us,

a quickened understanding that saw in the commonplace relationships of life the same forces and the same influences that, elsewhere, make and unmake kingdoms, paint pictures, discover continents and conceive a god.

Her poetry betrays the same aspect of modest area and penetrating, almost abysmal depth. Her shortest poems are often the most profound, her simplest statement the truest and her commonest word most full of meaning. This she might have accomplished by the long and patient building up of a literary technique, but her writing never could have lived and given to the world what it is giving to-day if it had not sprung from a profound understanding of the human elements in the baffling equation of life.

But she was not always as clear and explicit as this. The vastness of the thought she wished to express defied, sometimes, the limits of her cryptic pen. She knew what she meant. It was all clear

to her, but certainly after many years, and in the silence of those to whom the message was sent, it is difficult to catch the meaning of some of the notes even in my modest collection. I confess my inability to understand what is beneath this message sent to my mother in Pittsfield. What its occasion was or what gift, if any, it accompanied I do not now recall, if indeed I ever knew. She writes:

"DEAR FRIEND,

"Were the velocity of Affection as perceptible as its sanctity, Day and Night would be more Affecting.

"EMILY"

I can only dismiss it as one of the things that can no longer be translated in the lack of any knowledge of the tacit understandings and mutual sympathies of the woman who sent it and she who received. I have no doubt my mother knew exactly what it meant. It may well have been associated with certain aspects of Miss Emily's life upon which

no spoken or written words were ever exchanged between them, but which were a vital element in a close and affectionate relation. It may have been written on the anniversary of some incident familiar to both.

Days and dates meant much to her, but their real importance lay in what they meant to her friends. She never forgot the anniversary of a birth or death in the circle of her friends. She had no morbid interest in either, but human life enthralled her, and she felt the mystery and awe of its beginning and its close. Some of her most charming letters were sent on the occasion of a birth of a child, and the birthday was never forgotten.

The departure of our family from Amherst left a void in her life, but it could be filled, after her own fashion, by having more days to celebrate and mark in red upon her calendar, and more occasions to

send a message of affectionate greeting. She was tenacious of those she loved and fought to keep them in her life.

The first day of special import was the Easter Sunday after my family left Amherst. Easter, to Miss Emily, was a day full of meaning. Despite her somewhat unconventional theology, its spiritual quality touched her deeply, and it was a festival of the season of the year that stirred her to the very core of her being. It meant the miracle of spring, promise of new life, the reawakening of the world to beauty and fruitfulness. She thrilled and responded to it as she did to no other aspect of nature.

She marked the day with a message to my father and mother, characteristically brief, but under the circumstances singularly poignant. She sent a tiny sheet of note paper, without inscription or signature which said:

"May the Love that occasioned the first Easter shelter a few this bereaved day."

There never was a lovelier place than Amherst in the spring. As a boy I felt the intoxication of it. We had skated all winter on the shallow, frozen places in the Dickinson meadows, but now they were fair and green. Each year it was a mystery that those bleak acres of snow and ice and tufts of dead, brown grass should suddenly, almost overnight, become a paradise of green and gold and white.

One of the singular associations of my childhood was in regard to the familiar panels of Thorwaldsen, "Night" and "Morning." In those days a picture or a cast of them was in every home. The parsonage had a pair of them, hung side by side in oval frames. I never knew what they represented. If I had been told I had promptly forgotten. I had an idea of my own about one of them. This one, I think "Morning," I always associated with Miss Emily. Of course I knew it was not she, but I liked to think it was. It had, however, another

character. It seemed to me to be the best pictorial representation available of the person or power or whatever it was that worked the yearly miracle in the Dickinson meadows. So it represented two things to me, Miss Emily and Spring. As I look back now, I am inclined to think it was a natural and discriminating association. Miss Emily looked like Spring and she acted and felt like it to me. She loved it passionately and gloried in it.

Spring was to her the summit of the year. There were now near her hand a hundred symbols of it. Her garden and her world behind the hedge was full of them. She gathered and hoarded them that she might express through them the affection she felt for her friends and her desire to share with them her ecstasy. She elected to send my mother a few pussywillows, and sent with them a message, this time in her joyous spring mood. She said:

"Nature's buff message — left for you in Am-

herst. She had not time to call. You see her Father and my Father were brothers.

"EMILY"

This quaint identification of herself with the forces of nature was more than a humorous pose. She claimed a mystic cousinship with Nature, but she was vastly closer than that. If any human being could claim kinship with the sunshine and the rain she could, by every right of knowledge and of sympathy. My childish identification of her as the Goddess of Spring by an imagined likeness to something that did not represent spring, but which I thought did, is some slight evidence of the atmosphere she created.

I think the only prolonged interview I ever had with her alone was on a bleak winter day when an errand of some sort took me to "The Mansion." I was just leaving when Miss Emily called me back. She seemed to be in an unusual state of excitement. I was surprised not only by being called

back to her, which was most unusual, but by the intensity of her manner. She took me to her conservatory where she labored all winter to keep a succession of flowers in bloom. No one equalled her in her skill with flowers and, small as it was, her conservatory was a dream of loveliness. But she had more than a flower to show me that day.

"Come quickly," she said, "if you want to see something beautiful."

I followed her and she pointed out a wonderful moth which had broken its chrysalis and was fluttering about among her flowers. I wish I could now recall what she said, but small boy as I was, I knew the manner of a prophetess when I saw it, and recognized the voice when I heard it. To this day I never see a particularly gorgeous butterfly in my own garden or elsewhere that I do not feel a faint echo of the thrill for its beauty and mystery that Miss Emily tried to share with me that day. And it was like her to call me back to share it with

her. I was the youngest of the group, and at an age when food, and its honest or dishonest acquisition, was my ruling passion. I certainly was not very promising material, but it made no difference to Miss Emily. She was child enough to know just how thrilled a child would be by such a sight, even one addicted to the fleshpots as I was.

Flowers and all growing things were more than lovely objects to her. They were a real solace, a solace she always wished to share. A few wild flowers from Amherst were carefully packed and sent to my mother with the question:

"Would you feel more at Home with a flower from Home in your Hand, dear?"

It was not only flowers that she loved. While her spirit dwelt far away at times, she loved the solid earth, and the fullness thereof; the things she touched and handled, saw and heard and smelled were to her objects of almost ecstatic affection.

One spring, when Amherst was its loveliest, she exclaimed in a note to Sue:

"Oh, Matchless Earth. We underrate the chance to dwell in thee."

The autumn came and messages continued. I find one that is, again, Miss Emily at her most bewildering. No one, who ever knew her, accused her of willful obscurity, but, after many years, the intent of some of her letters couched in her cryptic style is difficult to seize. This note to my mother has an allusion in it, the meaning of which I could never fathom. She says in sending flowers:

"Dear Friend —

"I am picking you a flower for remembering Summer. He was his Country's — She is Time's — When Continents expire the Giants they discarded are Promoted to endure.

"Emily"

I must leave the explanation of this message to others who have more intimate knowledge than I.

The words "He was his Country's — She is Time's" may refer to some public event of importance at the time, but it is more likely that it had some intimate, personal meaning clear only to the person to whom it was sent.

To turn to a more clear and explicit message. Miss Emily, as I have repeatedly said, was a very human person. She missed my father and mother and she was, too, a bit jealous of new friends. She seemed to fear they might replace her in their hearts. She was concerned lest new surroundings and interests might dull the memory of Amherst and all it meant. While she rejoiced that her clergyman and his wife and family were in happy and congenial surroundings, and that success was attending his work, she felt a pang when she thought of new intimacies and friendships. She was entirely willing, too, that they should know her feeling. In a half humorous but rather touching little missive, sending forget-me-nots, she said:

"DEAR FRIENDS,

"I send you a little antidote to the love of others. Whenever you feel yourselves enticed cling to its Admonition.

"EMILY"

Whatever little pangs she felt Miss Emily remained loyal and followed the fortunes of her absent friends with eagerness. About this time my mother met with a painful accident from which she suffered for many months. Miss Emily heard of it, and was among the first to send a message, one of the longest letters my father ever received from her. She said:

"There would have been no smile on Amherst's face had she believed her clergyman's sweet wife to be suffering, but the paper spoke so obligingly we thought it an accident that endeared rather than endangered. That sorrow dare touch the loved is a mournful insult. We are all avenging it all the time, though as Lowell quotes from the Stranger, 'Live — live even to be unkind.'

"It is hard to think of our 'little friend' as a

sufferer — we peculiarly know through our suffering mother — but the tiniest are the mightiest — the Wren will prevail.

" Mother asked last Sabbath ' why Father did not come from Church ' and if ' Mr. Jenkins preached.' I told her he did, and that Father had lingered to speak with him. It was touching that harm should suggest Amherst. ' Bruised for our iniquities ' I had almost feared. Amherst, tell her, suggests her — and each of you, my shepherd, and will while will remains.

" EMILY " [1]

This letter draws its own picture. The suffering mother, helpless with a broken hip, living in the past, asking for loved ones no longer near her, and tenaciously clinging to old associations. Her gifted daughter by her side, answering so as to give her the least pain, guarding her from the realization that she was blundering and easing her anxieties as best she could. This is quite a differ-

[1] From " The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson." Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston.

ent picture from Miss Emily standing, with upraised hand, absorbed in the beauty of an Amherst sunset, and yet both are truthful pictures of her. Poet, mystic, tender nurse and laughing playmate, all facets of a brilliant, many-sided personality.

And what an exquisite touch she adds when she says, "but the tiniest are the mightiest, the Wren will prevail." Surely her own life was proof of the truth of her axiom. This same woman, who sat that Sabbath morning with her invalid mother, was one of the tiniest as the world might judge, but how she has "prevailed", and what power she has to sway the emotions and imaginations of thousands with her genius. And how felicitous the phrase, "an accident that endeared rather than endangered."

Miss Emily was apt with a pencil and in a tiny sketch of Amherst, sent my mother, everything was covered with snow except the parsonage. With it came a line saying:

" I omitted the snow on the roof, distrusting the premonition,

" EMILY "

In longer letters she often gave attractive glimpses of incidents in the two houses that constituted her physical world, and were the center of her life and interest.

In one she said:

" You deserved a tiding before, dear. Your little punctualities are generous and precious. Vinnie rode last night with Austin and the boy, but the latter cried for the moon which saddened their trip. He is an ardent jockey for so old a man, and his cries of ' Go Cadgie ' when they leave him behind rend the neighborhood.

" There is circus here, and Farmer's Commencement, and boys and girls from Tripoli, and Governors and swords parade the summer streets. They lean upon the fence that guards the quiet Church Ground and jar the grass now soft and warm as Tropic nest.

" Many people call and wish for you with tears,

and Vinnie beats her wings like a maddened bird whose home has been invaded.

"So much has been sorrow that to fall asleep in Tennyson's verse seems almost a Pillow. 'To where beyond these voices there is peace.'

"I hope you are each safe. It is homeless without you, and we think of others possessing you with the throe of Othello. Mother pleads her love, Maggie sends her own, Austin smiles when you mention him. He told me that one of the fine nights the tenants of your house sat in the door together, and he remarked to Sue, 'Those are not for whom I built the parsonage.'

"Daisies and Ferns are with us, and he whose meadow they magnify is always linked with you.

"EMILY"

The arrival of the circus was an event in Amherst. I recall hearing my father say that not the least of the difficulties of a clergyman in those days was the widely differing prejudices in different parishes. In an earlier parish he had found round dances, then just coming into vogue, permitted, but the circus was an instrument of the devil and

was shunned. In Amherst the decorous quadrille was still the accepted dance, but every one went to and gloried in the circus.

The circus traveled, at that time, over the road, and its arrival and departure were moments of delirious delight to every boy in town. But no boy, haunting the circus field from the moment of its arrival to the midnight hour of its departure, was more thrilled by it than Miss Emily. It passed her father's door either going or coming, and there was a delightful uncertainty about it. On circus night she sat up all night lest she miss it, peering from her darkened window and listening intently to hear the first sound of its approach. I like to think of her watching the creaking vans file by in the gray of dawn. The closed and silent wagons, with men and women and beasts in them, going slowly through the village streets, while a little woman in white sat at an upper chamber window and gloated in the suggested romance of the

road and this nomad life, a romance enhanced by the morning twilight and the stillness of a country village as it slept.

No aspect of life was lost to her. She saw and felt it all much more vividly than many who were in the thick of it. Farmer's Commencement was the Graduation Exercises at the State College of Agriculture, one of the features of Amherst life.

Being a State institution, its Commencement was always graced by dignitaries from Boston, and there was much gold lace and many cocked hats and other military accouterments. All this Miss Emily watched with a whimsical aloofness. When the dignitaries leaned upon the fence that guarded the churchyard they were well within her range of vision from her window, and there was not a pompous gesture or a strutting step that she did not see and accurately assess.

She draws her brother and his wife on the piazza of the house next door, looking across the street to

the parsonage, and quotes her brother's comment that it was not for them that he built it. While Austin Dickinson sympathized with and understood my father's reasons for leaving Amherst, he never was fully reconciled, and it was the grass around this church and parsonage that the "governors and swords jarred." Here was no melancholy recluse, leading a life of introspection and sorrow, but an accomplished woman vividly aware of the life about her and commenting on it with penetrating humor and sympathy.

She had a habit of concise and accurate estimate often expressed in her notes. It is extraordinary how much of the world can be seen from one window overlooking a village street. She had no prying interest in the affairs of her neighbors; she cared little who passed or on what errand they were bent. What absorbed her was the drama of life and the movement of the puppets and their actions as they responded to the tug on the invisible

cords that controlled them, the unseen ends of which were in the hands of fate.

One of her most penetrating sketches was of a pious neighbor and friend who, at certain seasons of the year, dressed in her best and attended daily revival meetings for the social pleasures she derived from them.

Another letter more pensive in mood but breathing the same qualities of affection and consideration for others.

"DEAR FRIEND:

"It was pathetic to see your voice instead of hearing it, for it has grown sweetly familiar in the house, as a bird's. Father left us in May, you leave us in June. I am glad there will be no April till another year. Austin brought the note and waited like a hungry boy for his crumb of the words. Be sure to speak his name next time, he looks so solitary.

"He told me that he could not sleep Friday night or Saturday night, and rose and read lethargic books to stupefy himself. Sorrow is unsafe when

it is real sorrow. I am glad so many are counterfeits — guileless because they believe themselves. Kiss Diddie and Mac for us, precious refugees, with love for our brother whom with you we follow in the peculiar distance ' even unto the end.'

" Perhaps it is ' the end ' now. I think the bell thought so because it bade us goodbye when you stood in the door.

" You concealed that you heard it. Thank you.

" EMILY "

There is a touch in this letter that brings out quite clearly one side of this remarkable character, some phases of which I am trying to describe. Everything in Miss Emily's world was personal. Her home and her garden, the flowers, the birds, her friends and the children were not appurtenances of her life, they were elements in it. The cats washing themselves in the sunshine were not useful household pets who caught mice; they were part of an organic whole, part of the world in which she lived; and the bobolinks and butterflies were more to her than pretty symbols or graceful

words to use in poems. They were fellow residents of Amherst and kin to her in her world behind the hedge. They told her things as truly as the friend who called, and I fancy she regarded their communications as vastly more important than many that came from human lips. She had created for herself a spiritual solar system in which she lived and every thing in it was important and full of meaning.

So it was with festivals and village happenings. Cattle Show and Commencement were the expression of life, not a detail of it. The town clock and the church bell were her neighbors, and part of the fabric of her life. In this letter we catch a sense of this unity with the little things about her. It so chanced that my mother called to make her farewells, and stood in the door taking her departure, just as the bell in the village church was ringing for the evening service. Miss Emily was quick to sense this. The bell was not a fortuitous circum-

stance, a little happening without meaning. It was another familiar neighbor, a loved friend at a sad leave-taking, and it had its message. It seemed to her to toll for the end of a friendship. Without affectation or pose, she speaks of it in her letter as naturally as she might have spoken of any other friend. It was this marvellous power to identify herself with all about her, with nature and with human life, that makes her a great poet, and made her a wonderful neighbor and an inspiring friend.

Perhaps the most intimate of the letters in my possession was written in the fall, some months after my family had left Amherst. Miss Emily was still mourning her absent friends, but keeping closely in touch with them. She writes:

"DEAR MR. AND MRS. PASTOR;

"Mrs. Holland pleased us and grieved us by telling of your triumphs. We want you to conquer, but we want you to conquer here. 'Marathon' is me. Is there nothing but glow on the

new horizon? You see we keep a jealous heart. That is love's alloy.

"Vinnie is full of wrath, and vicious as Saul against the Holy Ghost in whatever form. I heard her declaiming the other night to a foe that called, and sent Maggie to part them. Vinnie lives on the hope that you will return. Is it quite fictitious?

"You are gone too long. The red leaves take the green leaves place, and the landscape yields. We go to sleep with the peach in our hand and wake with the stone, but the stone is the pledge of summers to come.

"Love to each of you always, and if there are lands longer than 'always' love also for these.

"These are sticks of rowen for your store. It was chopped by bees and butterflies piled it Saturday afternoons.

"EMILY"

The enclosure was just as she described it. A tiny bunch of second-growth grass, probably from her father's meadow, near the house, where the rowen was being cut.

But what a poignant little letter it is. Some-

thing has gone out of this woman's life, something very dear to her, and she was jealously hoping that chance might restore it. But with it all, that constant, flashing, ironic humor. Her allusion to her devoted sister who was more outspoken and vehement in her protests against fate than Miss Emily was. In certain moods Vinnie did "declaim"; that was just the word for it. And the "foe" who called. What a perfect touch. She knew and understood Vinnie's attitude to the world. She knew that she was forever watching lest the dearest friend intrude inopportunely or stay too long. If she did, she was "foe" indeed. And Maggie appears again in the picture. This time to calm the troubled waters. How successful she was I do not know. From my recollections of this redoubtable person, I should say she would be more adept at troubling the waters than in calming them. But Maggie was a person of infinite adaptability and resource.

Again nature is invoked to give the desired

touch, to supply the analogy for the mood she wishes to express. The result is an almost matchless sentence; "We go to sleep with the peach in our hand and wake with the stone, but the stone is the pledge of summers to come."

Apart from the poetic quality of the letter it shows us again quite plainly the womanly side of her character. She followed the fortunes of her absent friends and rejoiced in their successes, but there was just a touch of natural human jealousy. She was amused by what she knew to be the unfounded hopes of her militant sister but she could not refrain from a wistful expression of hope that they be not utterly visionary. This she expresses, as was her wont with all her deeper emotions, through a symbol from the world of nature that gave her so much solace and so much joy, a world she knew and loved and had made part of her life.

This is the last of the letters in my small collection, but they are enough to give a very clear pic-

ture of the woman who wrote them. They too emphasize an important part of her and one that is in danger of being misunderstood or ignored.

It is the fate of every person who gains distinction, that sooner or later, there gathers about them a mythology, a mass of legend concerning their lives and characteristics. In time this obscures the real personality and tends to an entire misconception of it and the ideals it stood for. When the personality is unusual, when certain aspects of its experience are unconventional or romantic, the temptation to clothe it in legend is always great.

This danger is assailing the memory of Emily Dickinson, and if it persists it may well mar the appreciation of her poetry, and detract from the understanding of the beauty of her life and character. A poet's influence is in precise ratio to the directness and simplicity of his approach to the minds

and hearts of his readers, and the greater the poet the more essential is this directness and simplicity. To enable the world to get the most from his writing, the world must have a clear perception of the springs of character and experience which inspired it. With the lesser poets, whose tinkling melodies satisfy the ear and please the senses, it is not essential, the cadenced lines are the message and they satisfy. There is no great need to search back of them, for there is little there to reward a search.

But with a poet of real nobility, who is expressing the verities with exquisite fancy and potent imagery, and to whose verse one feels the quick response of the deepest and truest impulses of one's own nature, it is immensely important that his image be not blurred by unreality. And Emily Dickinson is such a poet. But unreality is assailing her and her image will be blurred unless she be placed before the world as she truly was.

Already her niece has given us a detailed, authori-

tative and altogether delightful biography, written with unerring taste and discrimination, but much has happened since it was written. New poems have been discovered and published. These have enormously increased the poet's prestige and reputation; Amherst is becoming a Mecca, and the world, no longer a small discriminating part of it, has come to a realization that Emily Dickinson is a poet of the very first rank, perhaps the greatest America has produced.

This has meant too that the myth-maker is busy, and every detail of her life is being dressed in the fabulous array of fable. To present a simple and unadorned picture of the poet in her relations to her family and intimate friends is the object of this modest volume.

Her biography tells of her ancestry and her early associations, her education and her later life. It is wholly adequate. But no biographer can go far from the facts as known, for biography is not fic-

tion and it is not metaphysics. The advantage of a slender volume of this sort is that it is entirely informal; it makes no pretense to be a final valuation of its subject. It is the result of childhood recollection and more mature reflection. The attenuated character of its structure permits explorations in the realm of conjecture without fear of criticism.

Emily Dickinson sprang from sturdy stock. Somewhere in the past had appeared a strain of intellectual independence that survived in her, and was characteristic of all the members of her family. Her early life and education was not dissimilar from that of most young girls of the period. She chanced to be born in a college town where the atmosphere of culture was, in this instance, charged with a certain quaint whimsicality and piquancy. I have attempted to suggest this. The religious influences of her early years were the most conventional, exactly like those of every other young per-

son of that generation. The books she read, the people she saw, the contacts she made were not uncommon, though they were vastly more varied than usual, owing to the distinction and reputation of her father.

But from the very beginning she was different, she was unusual. Parents and teachers alike noticed it and commented upon it. She was not "queer" in the New England sense of that delightful word, but she was different. And this difference lay not in the actual facts of her life and experience but in her reaction to them.

She was sensitized to life in a different key, the whole cadence of her being was quicker, she felt acutely things that were but dull intimations to most people. She responded to a wholly different set of stimuli and her reactions were individual reactions, not herd or clan reactions. In this lay the whole difference.

Now, superimpose such an intellectual or nerv-

ous equipment, call it what you may, upon an entirely normal character and you achieve the results that baffle when an estimate of her is attempted.

This vibrant, responsive quality has been allowed to obscure her normal attributes, when as a matter of fact it simply illumines them. They help us to see that the line between the spiritual and the mundane is not very decided, and that the humblest human relationships are full of intimations of things of the spirit. What has this little packet of letters shown us?

In the first place we have seen her at play with the children. Herself a child in the sense that she reveled in the make-believe of the world we lived in. She made herself part of the game and did her share to give it reality. She defended, fed and comforted us, she saw the humor of our most inelegant predicaments, and praised on occasions things that brought us obliquy and blame. But she saw in us intimations of something more, and

she wrote us notes and little poems that helped bring it nearer to us. She called the youngest and hungriest of them all to her side in her conservatory and showed him something beautiful and told him about it in words, long forgotten, perhaps never understood, but left with him a lifelong sense of reality and beauty.

She loved her older friends passionately, and, as with the boy in the conservatory, she tried to share with them her constant ecstasy in life and nature. When she was separated from them she confessed to jealous misgivings, and sought to bind them to her lest she should lose them. She loved her town, and the hills about it, she followed all the little happenings with eager interest, and where there was pretence and folly she saw it and rebuked it.

Her family relations were of the most tender and beautiful character. Her adored brother and his gifted wife were her idols, and his family only lesser gods.

But through all these human qualities flashed the restless, inquiring mind, and beneath them surged an undaunted spirit that longed to be on its business with greater things. She loved her hills, but she asked them, "What is morning?"

The early years of her life found her engaged in the usual social activities of a young woman of her gifts and social position, but even then she was the same eager, ardent questioning spirit that she was in retirement. Her renunciation of the world did not make her what she was. She withdrew from the world because it was the only thing a person, constituted as she was, could have done. It was as inevitable and logical as a mathematical equation. Given a certain type of sensitive personality, and expose it to the terrific spiritual impact of such an experience, and there could be but one result.

It is not fitting or necessary in this sketch of her to more than allude to the great emotional upheaval in her life. It had nothing to do with her

superb loyalty as a friend or her charm and kindliness as a neighbor. Its only possible connection with this scanty estimate of her is that it again shows the beauty and sincerity of her human qualities. It was the only course of action open to a nature endowed as hers was and is the key to all the mystery of her rare and complicated character.

And its mystery and complexity lay in the fact that, with every human attribute developed to the highest degree, she had too a spiritual sensitiveness that brought, with her, the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit so close together that they mingled and became one.

The world is fortunate that she has left it a priceless legacy in her poems. They should be read with reverent sympathy. No truth or beauty will be found in them for the reader who regards them as the exotic and morbid utterances of a saddened recluse. Their transcendent quality lies in the fact that they interpret for us a life so near the verities

that we are tempted to regard it as beyond the pale of common humanity. We forget that human life can be almost divine in its sympathy and understanding of the truth. We forget that there is a "divinity in man", and that the shadowy intimations of it are the birthright of the poet. Such a poet and such a woman was Emily Dickinson.

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